
Seiun wo Kakeru 5

The Commencement of Shipping

Fumitoshi Hizen

Chapter 58 – Back to Tal Village

The boat progressed forward just like gliding.

The clear weather on the sky continued, and the warm sunlight poured down.

Indeed, it's a good time for setting off... – he thought.

Since this was his first trip by boat, Eiji didn't know how convenient it would become.

He had only the fear about the weather, but, that too, seemed to be a needless worry.

The sky was cloudless and radiating brightly with the sunlight.

Sitting on the deck of the ship, Eiji turned his sight toward the front while enjoying the swaying of the boat that one cannot experience normally.

In comparison with a cart pulled by cattle, the boat was advancing far quicker.

It was probably because the boat was traveling downstream on the river.

Providing the boat moves with this speed, they will probably reach Tal Village within a short amount of time.

The sight from the top of the boat was different than those seen during a walk or in the car.

The point of view looked high and clear.

Because Eiji's previous visit to Tal was when the season entered fall, or so, it would make it around half a year since the last time he was there.

Certainly, it was a tremendously busy year. – He thought.

Eiji thrust the oars in beneath the river's surface.

After they had left Siena, the forest would constantly stretch; nevertheless, it finally began to end.

From that point, the Tal village will be appearing in front of them.

The other villages' populations weren't large enough to require lumbering trees and reclaiming the land.

Therefore, the forest was vast, and the villages would be settled in various places near the forest's borders.

Feeling the force from the water, Eiji sensed firm power in his hands as he created splashes on the surface of the water.

As he fixed the oars like that, the bow gradually turned to the right.

Fernando stood next to Eiji.

His sight was similarly directed toward Tal.

– Hey hey, only one hour has passed since we set off. Isn't it unreasonably fast?

– Back when we traveled there, it took us a whole day, right?

– At least from what I remember, we arrived in the evening. So this is a boat?

– Now, can you understand the reason why I was fixated on this idea?

– Yeah, I agree with you.

Fernando would usually be entrusted with the trade negotiations with Tal.

Because of that, he probably understood the convenience coming from the boat's speed well.

Even a freight car was slightly slower than people walking without any belongings on them.

Since they would set off very early in the morning and reach their destination by the time the sun sets, was the distance between the villages perhaps around some 40 kilometers?

When it comes down to it, this boat's speed would be more than some 30 kilometers per hour.

At this rate, it seems we will be able to quickly move towards the next village. – He thought.

As soon as Eiji reached the closest point near the tribal chief's house, he faced toward the stern and dropped two anchors.

Dobon – together with the heavy sound, the anchors sunk.

Gkkun – just like being caught in, finally, the chains connecting the boat stretched fully, making it sway hard.

The riverside wasn't outfitted even for docking and rope tying.

As a result of that, Eiji decided to moor the boat with the anchors in order to avoid the possibility of damaging the boat's bottom.

It was also due to him being unfamiliar with the methods of halting a boat on the water.

- Oh my, we have already arrived? That was fast.
- If we can progress this fast, our trade will take a step ahead, won't it?
- Certainly, before it used to take us 2 days, but like this, we will be able to return back on the same day. This is a big deal. Speaking of which, how do we disembark the cargo?
- About that....

Eiji looked at the riverside.

The boat stopped in the center of the river with a considerable depth of water.

Judging by his eye, the depth was probably not less than one meter. Unlike in Siena, where the boat was loaded directly on the riverside, this time, there was the fear that the goods would get soaked.

- I didn't think about that. Should we place them in a large barrel? Or perhaps, should we have each village build a small craft? There's no need for them to construct a dock, I guess.
- Honestly, get a grip on yourself. After all, you're the initiator.
- I'll pay more attention.

Eiji's lowered his head docilely as his was prideful face a while ago took a complete change.

After getting closer to the riverside as much as possible with a ramp, they transported the smithing tools together with animal furs in barrels and tubs.

As they were disembarking the cargo, a villager approached their boat after noticing it.

- Fer, What the hell is that?!
- Yo, Giro. It's a boat, which I built. This time, we intend to do our trade using this to cross the river.
- The river....with a boat....such a thing, I've never seen it before.

After looking in turns at the boat and Fernando's face, Girolamo stood still without uttering a single word.

Perhaps he had never seen a properly build boat that is bigger than a small craft.

Why haven't they developed a decent boat until now?

Eiji thought that it could be related to the invention of the saw.

Making lumber, plainly without any saw, is a job takes an awful lot of time.

Considering the time that is required to make something larger than a small craft, wouldn't they cease the need of doing so while facing the problem of technology?

At Eiji who was thinking, Girolamo bowed down.

Eiji had also thought this before, but, this tribal chief is exceedingly modest.

On top of that, he was warm-hearted.

Both his words and his smiling face were reassuring. Girolamo was a good man.

– Hello, it was Eiji-san, wasn't it? Long time no see.

– Long time no see.

– Thank you for the fasteners and the iron hammers that you gave us last time. They were incredibly helpful. Saying so, this time....

– Yes, just like I promised, I've brought you hoes and scythes.

– Is that so? That's a blessing. Everyone in the village will be glad.

The last time Girolamo paid Eiji a visit was quite a long one

Back then, Eiji once refused Girolamo's request.

His tools were still imperfect as the villagers pointed out their tendency to chip.

Selling an incomplete item is a pain for an artisan.

Even since then, Eiji has been applying the method of trial and error.

Adjusting the amount of carbon in the iron, understanding the right temperature of the built fire, Eiji grasped feelings that cover a lot of ground.

It wouldn't be an exaggeration to say that he has acquired a full knowledge of making iron by himself.

Being self-confident, Eiji was now able to hand the hoes to Girolamo.

Putting a friendly smile on his face, Girolamo would welcome his guests from the bottom of his heart.

Calling out with his voice, the villagers gathered, making it seem like they were surrounding Eiji.

He wasn't familiar with being watched by many sights.

With his movements clumsier than usual, Eiji took out the tools.

Oohh – Each time he took out the Hoes, scythes, plows, lumbering hatchets, and woven mats, a large commotion occurred.

You could say that an inventor get more blessings than he deserves.

– Eiji felt the joy itching to gush out from his body once he understood that his made tools were in attention.

– So this is the iron hoe...? Indeed, it's deep black. Is this the same as that easily rusting iron?

– I too have become used to seeing it, but, as expected, the first time I saw it, it gave out an unpleasant feeling.

– I don't understand it as I've only watched the iron since my birth, you see. Later, if you leave it wet, its tendency to rust won't change. Therefore, it's important to cleanly wipe the water and let it dry in the shade.

Girolamo's impressions seemed to be the consensus of everyone's opinion in this village.

Taking out the tools, Eiji handed each one of them to the villagers.

Everyone checked the sensation of use from their tools. If it was the hoe, they would dig up the soil, if they had a scythe, they would mow the grass.

– Oooh. Is this the rumored scythe?! So light.

– First, you should prioritize weak and old people's circumstances.

– No, even a young person can cultivate a vast field using this. That's why, I should be the one to hold it.

– Aren't you just wanting to have some fun? Respect the elderly!

– Even though you're the ones who would usually forward us manual labor, what are you talking about?

It looked like that the rumors of the iron had spread inside Tal village. While deciding who should be the one to possess which tool, a quarrel broke out immediately as they competed against each other. Everyone became desperate to obtain the superior tools as much as possible.

However, there was no way for Eiji to pass every member a tool.

From now on, there was a need to trade some of them with the other villages.

It was painful; nevertheless, this time, Eiji had a limit of just 20 hoes to present.

– Because Tal village should do the job of choosing the owners for the tools, I'll leave that matter to you guys. More importantly, do you have any other wish for tools besides the farming ones? Depending on what you request, I should be able to make them today, but...

– Ahh, I'd like a spatula.

– A spatula? It's a small item, so it will be fine. I shall start making it today.

There were other necessary tools, which weren't known unless they were local.

Eiji planned to go around the villages with his tools, making them efficient for promotion and trade purposes.

The article, which was instantly desired by the girl with a small stature, seemed to be needed in a detailed work where she would separate, stick, and adjust the shape of clay during the process of making pottery.

Because it only required plain shaping of a thin iron plate into the desirable form, the process itself was simple.

Eiji immediately consented.

– Fernando-san, clear out the people.

– Everyone, we still have some works to do, so please disband. The madam that requested the spatula, that's right, you're indeed a beautiful woman. Won't you stay here for a moment? Allow me to ask you several questions regarding the shape and the handle of the item we should make. Your name is, ah, Fiore wasn't it? Indeed, it's a nice name. If this evening is fine by you, how about a meal together?

– Oi, Fero, what are you doing?

– Isn't it fine, Giro? I'm just having some interaction, that's right, interaction.

Just what on earth is this person doing?

Good grief- while breathing out a sigh, Eiji went back to the river.

He brought a complete set of tools from the boat.

As soon as Eiji puts the bricks together, places charcoal, and prepares a pair of bellow, he will be able to make a simplistic furnace in an instant.

And adding the smithing tools that are the metal hammer and the

anvil, the preparation for the work commencement will be done.
It seemed that Fernando was still speaking to the woman despite not learning his lesson.

Is what Eiji thought, however, it looked like Fernando's attempt of picking up the woman was going quite favorably.

The woman, Fiore, put a smile on her face.

Eiji had the feeling that he would interrupt their enjoyable conversation; nevertheless, he cut in, as Fernando also had a job to do.

- Fernando-san, please take a break for a moment.
- Hm, yeah. Sorry for that.
- Sorry for having our talk interrupted, but but could I see your current spatula? I need to see it to figure out the right size.
- If it becomes even a bit of help, I don't mind at all. Although, the one I am currently using is a wooden-made one. Is that alright?
- That's fine. I want to know its size and shape.

Once she apologized, her face turned red rapidly.

It appears that Fernando came back to himself.

Among the iron materials prepared by Eiji, he took out the small one that was already made into a sheet, and threw it inside the furnace.

Striking and stretching the red-scorched iron, he cut it using the clippers.

It seemed that there were many people doing the same type of job as Fiore, so Eiji decided to make several items at the same time.

- Hey, Eiji-kun.
- What?
- Please don't tell anyone.
- What? Honestly, I don't know what you mean. Can I have you make the pattern quickly?
- No, it's fine for you not to know. I too only enjoy drinking alcohol.
- Hm. Because I don't know, I might recklessly have a slip of the tongue and tell Adele-san.
- Stop thattt! It will be bad if she gets mad.
- To what extent?
- Like being beaten with a whip as a form of punishment.
-

- I'm trusting you.
- Ah, no. Yes... I thought about it long time ago, but Adele-san's way of expressing her love is quite extreme, isn't it?

Eiji nodded without realizing.

While grumbling, Fernando took the knife and cut the lumber while making the design fast and efficiently.

His movements were quick and accurate.

Once the spatula was done, Fernando struck and inserted the rivets into the notches, as if wedging them inside.

Even though Fernando took just a single glance at the measurements when he put them in, at the end, the rivets were perfectly fixed to the extent of not falling out easily.

Excluding the preparations, their collaborative work took no more than 30 minutes.

Holding the finished spatula, Eiji moved toward Fiore.

- Sorry for making you wait. This is the spatula that you ordered.
- T-Thank you very much. I didn't think it would be finished this quickly.
- Usually, it would take a little bit longer, but Fernando was here this time, so it was special.

Had it been an edged tool that requires grinding, it would have probably taken them more time. Besides that, the work normally consumes more time, as Fernando would make the pattern after Eiji finished his part.

Not to mention, this time it was also faster thanks to the absence of quenching.

However, was Fiore making a wrong conclusion? Her face blushed red as she took a glimpse of Fernando in a peeking manner.

- T-thank you. Please come again at night!
- Ah, yes. Again at night...?

She left as if running away.

Wasn't there something unpleasant?

Eiji felt like somebody made a life threatening push on him.

- Eiji, nice support!

- I won't tell anyone, but if your secret leaks out, I really won't care.
- That woman won't go out from the village, so it's fine! Aah, this is the true charm of trips.

At Fernando's glad voice, Eiji breathed out a sigh.

Chapter 59 – The Promise with Tal Village

As soon as the smithing work concluded, it was decided that Eiji and Fernando would receive a warm welcome inside the house of the tribal chief, Girolamo.

It was the spring time.

The dining table was abundant in spring vegetables, like cabbage and celery, fried wild plants, goat cheese, and grilled river fishes.

A meal like this probably wouldn't be served during the winter.

Most of the dishes, lined up on the humble table, were pickled and smoked type of food.

What's more, the baked good was a white type of bread.

Even the way in which Girolamo would welcome his guests could be guessed.

Eiji garnished the table with single pot of distilled alcohol that was stacked among the trading goods in the boat.

– This is?

– An extraordinarily spicy alcohol. It's my favorite.

– Fero's? Eiji-san...

– Yes. It's an item containing strengthened wine and made using a unique production method. Because this person seemed to take a liking to this alcohol, he would request it as a form of reward for his work, and drink one after another while making our stock fall short.

– Heh? That's rare for Fero to be crazy about something. However much we treated him to a feast, his composed expression wouldn't change.

– Won't you try drinking it?

Girolamo gazed at the pot containing the distilled alcohol with a deep interest.

Wearing a deeply curious face, apparently, Girolamo had a weakness for alcohol.

Next to him, Fiore, who was abstaining like she promised herself, was too, showing her curiosity toward the distilled alcohol.

Once they were offered the distilled alcohol, the two of them nodded unhesitatingly.

It looked like both of them were fond of beverages.

After the alcohol was poured into his wine cup, Girolamo slowly smelled its aroma, checked its color, and tasted it in a licking manner.

Within an instant, his eyes opened wide, as surprise was painted on his face.

– This is...! D-Delicious. You can clearly feel the taste of alcohol.

– What's this? This is the first time for me to taste something like this, and it's amazingly strong.

– I knew that if it was Giro, you'd understand.

– Yeah, it's truly delicious. I've never drunk anything like this. Just who made this beverage?

– It was me.

– ...I see. So apart from being excellent in smithing, it seems that you also know about other, various technology which we are unaware of. If possible, can I have you tell me the method of creating this alcohol? I'll make sure to reward you appropriately.

– The method of creating? That's.....

As expected, is it fine to tell him about that? – Eiji thought.

Providing that he does not, he will be able to monopolize this technology.

And naturally, Eiji would be able to gain the control over profits.

On the other hand, in order to own the right for its production, there was the problem of unusually low level of supplies.

Despite Siena continuously developing various technology at present, its number of laborers was still remarkably insufficient.

It was a state where even moving children from the house chores wasn't enough to cover the lack of manpower.

Even though the villagers gained free time thanks to the reduction of labor by the watermill, they would sacrifice their leisure for new jobs.

That being the case, their livelihood kept progressing rapidly.

Eiji's reforms would continue from that moment as well.

There was a need to release the technology somewhere, to the outside, sooner or later.

The problem was what kind of impact will the disclosure of the alcohol have? Will Tal Village benefit from that? And then, will the distilled alcohol itself bring a fine result?

Beverages have the strange power of involving money, people, and authority.

Because of that, these families who are in charge of producing alcohol are the ones who hold enormous power.

As far as Eiji knew, it was also clear that the alcohol brewery covered a range of affairs in the Japanese government.

He gazed slowly at Girolamo.

Why does he want to make distilled alcohol? – Eiji thought he had to understand Girolamo's true motif.

– Girolamo-san, why do you consider making this alcohol?

At Eiji's question, Girolamo replied to him by asking reversely.

– Eiji-san, do you know what's this village specialty?

– It would be earthenware, wouldn't it? I've observed it before, so I remember.

– That's right. Our specialty is earthenware. However, our potteries are heavy and break easily. Also, because of the difficulty of their transport, the chances of raising their value are limited, so they are not suitable for trade. At that point, I thought that using alcohol as the trade product will be more favorable.

– However, this distilled alcohol is not fit for mass production. I can't tell you how it works, but it's something similar to concentrating a normal wine multiple of times.

– In that case, won't you try making it in each village? I mean, this distilled alcohol was never heard of or seen before. Certainly, even if your request is a bit unreasonable, they should want to help.

Girolamo noticed well the true value of the distilled alcohol.

And then, one could say his goal was to make the village more prosperous.

As long as he accepts some conditions to certain degree, shouldn't it be fine to tell him? – Eiji became curious about that.

He wouldn't mind even if they were to use the alcohol for sterilization.

Despite that, there were some matters in which Eiji couldn't make

decision by himself.

There was no way for him to simply nod in agreement.

– I'll discuss that matter at once with my village, so, for now I'll put that idea on hold. Even if I'm to tell, I have to prioritize Siena's interests first, and create several restrictions.

– I don't mind about that. I said that because the future of the earthenware that we are making now doesn't look bright. For the sake of this village, please consider that positively by any means.

– Hey, it's fine to talk about some difficult topics, but, we should slowly enjoy eating and drinking while deepening our friendly relations. Also, the meal that was prepared with everyone's effort will get cold.

– It's just like Fero says, isn't it? Eiji-san, my hospitality is humble, but please enjoy.

At Girolamo's words, the welcome banquet commenced.

Fiore walked around while pouring wine into cups, up to the brim.

Eiji tried the wine made by Tal Village.

Its sourness was stronger than what he would drink in Siena.

Even though it was the same type of wine, this one had a subtle difference in taste.

Isn't it normal? – he thought.

Depending on the producing area and the age, the value and taste of the wine will change,

Despite the places being near to each other, it was probably natural for a wine that was produced by its respective village to show a difference in taste.

The grilled fish and the pickle were properly carrying their function as they tasted delicious.

More than anything, the white bread was exceptionally more tasty than those usually eaten, and it was sweet, probably thanks to the use of honey.

As the meal was progressing, Fiore stood up and moved toward the house corner.

– Well then, I'll allow myself to play a single melody in commemoration of the two guests from Siena.

– Fiore is an expert of flute.

As soon Fiore took out a transverse flute carved from wood, she gently blew her breath into it.

Shortly after that, the tribal chief's quite house was accompanied with a sudden tune.

The pleasant tune that went up and down enthusiastically from time to time was able to lighten and soften everyone's expression.

Indeed, this is amazing – Eiji admired in honesty.

His ears felt pleasant.

Without realizing it, Eiji held his breath and listened attentively to the melody.

Eiji didn't know how hard she must have diligently studied, but there was no doubt it was a musical performance on a quite high level.

Her dazzling finger movements were complex and wouldn't rest even for a moment.

Unlike the music at the time of festival of abundant crops, this composition was gorgeous.

Finally, when a remarkably high tune signaled the end of the performance, Eiji clasped his hands spontaneously.

– Oh my, it's the first time for me to listen, but it was a splendid performance.

– Bravo! Fiore-chan, I was deeply moved! There's no doubt you're the embodiment of the goddess of tunes. Well, it's fine for you to moisten your mouth by drinking this beverage.

– Thank you very much.

Fernando suggested Fiore to continuously drink the distilled alcohol.

Could it be that he's planning to have her get totally drunk? – Eiji thought, however, Girolamo didn't say anything either, so he didn't particularly bother to mention that.

Because Fernando was constantly giving his attention to Fiore, it was just natural for Eiji to have a conversation with Girolamo.

– Really? So after you had returned back from your last visit, such a thing took place? As expected, it looks like Franko isn't a man that should be taken lightly.

– That's right. To think that he would bring those disciples that fast, I didn't expect that.

– It must be hard for you to have such trouble brought upon you. If

there's anything you need, please feel free to talk with me. Despite my poor abilities, I'll become your strength.

– Thank you, but, why are you willing to go through such an effort?
– Siena is located near the furthest end of this island. Tal as well, is at that end, before Siena. It's probably the best for the fellows living near the edge to put their strength together and cooperate.... As for me, you see, I think there's more mutual profit in collaborating, rather than quarreling and stealing each other's power.

– I agree.

– Nazioni accomplished a meritorious deed by uniting the whole island, but after that, if I were to say it bluntly, nobody gained any benefit. By wringing out the villagers, Nazioni is currently the only winner.

And then, Girolamo lowered his voice.

His gentle look turned rapidly into a serious one and his low voice was filled with sternness.

– You see, I think that their dominance will fall sooner or later.

– Could it be...!?

– A mutiny is bound to happen somewhere when the people's dissatisfaction reaches its limit. Will they be suppressed, or will they meet with success? I don't know, but a single disturbance is needed. At that time, those we will truly rely on are the ones with whom we can establish a firm relationship.

At Girolamo's words, Eiji gulped down his breath.

It looked like the mood in this society was far more tense than what Eiji had expected.

– Starting with Fero, whom I've been maintaining contact with, I think the tribal chief, Bona, is also someone that can be respected. And then, Eiji-san, not only can your wisdom and skills bring happiness to many people, you possess the charm to attract them. That's why, however much cooperation you need, you can count on me. Well, it looks like as if I'm trying to gain your gratitude in advance, so it's better to pay attention without listening to my every word.

Girolamo, who was smiling and telling from himself to pay attention, was indeed generous.

Even if he was trying to act, Eiji thought that Girolamo's desire of maintaining a good relationship was genuine.

Eiji lifted the wine cup.

Girolamo lifted his cup as well and clinked it together with Eiji's.

– At that time, I'll rely on you without holding back, Girolamo-san.

– You're always welcome.

gulp gulp – they poured wine into their throats as they made sound.

Not just their body, but also their hearts, were warm as if maintaining the heat.

– Oi, both of you, why are your expressions serious? Won't you drink?

– I'll drink, Fero.

The next morning.

Raising up from a straw-made mattress, Fernando held down his lower back.

– awie awie... my lower back hurts.

– Fernando-san, could it be that you...

– Hm? What's the matter, Eiji-kun?

– No, nothing.

– Ah, don't worry. My back hurts because I slept on a different bed than usually.

– Is that so? I'm relieved.

It seemed that Fernando-san didn't try to lay his hands after all. – Eiji thought.

– Well then, should we continue our trip to the next village?

– I guess so, Fernando-san, what's the name of the next village?

– What? Even though you are the one who arranged this schedule, you don't know? The next one is Mostori. It's a village famous for a group of peddlers.

– A group of peddlers? So there are actually many of them?

– You will know once you are there, but I'll repeat myself only once, the peddler, Jean, who previously visited Siena, is from Mostori.

What is the group of peddlers?

There is no doubt that its a village that lives on trade.

For Eiji, those words sounded highly attractive.

Chapter 60 – The Tribal Chief of Mostori, Pierro (first part)

Departing from Tal Village, Eiji and Fernando boarded onto the boat once more.

The boat advanced lightly.

The sail, which received a considerable amount of wind, swelled out and continued to progress forward vigorously.

Unlike the short cruise from Siena to Tal, today's was a long one.

On their way to Mostori, they passed by 3 villages.

It was due to a piece of advice given by Girolamo saying that these villages were plain and unattractive for trade.

Judging from Girolamo's perspective, the fact that he could just tell them to trade with the nearby villages meant that he prioritized Eiji's interest.

It was a conversation for which Eiji was thankful.

Even though there was a need to popularize iron tools, it didn't mean they had to negotiate directly with all the villages.

Creating gaps while promoting will probably result in rumors being more effective just like an expanding ripple on the water.

The view from the boat was monotonous.

Despite it giving Eiji a fresh experience at first due to him not being familiar, as expected, one would grow tired of watching the same scenery for many long hours.

Gazing absentmindedly in the advancing direction, Eiji changed the direction of motion from time to time.

They departed in the early morning, however, it was already the time for the sun to move west.

Based on Girolamo's information, they were probably going to reach Mostori village soon.

Fernando, who stood on the bow, seemed to spot something.

– Oh! Eiji-kun, Look. Isn't that the village of Mostori?

– Where?

– You can't see from this distance? Looks like your eyes are slightly bad. You'll understand once we draw closer, from the city's splendid rows of houses.

What Fernando pointed out in front was still small, blurry, and impossible for Eiji to guess.

Indeed, the eyesight of people on this island is way too excellent.

Eiji made a wry smile.

There are many blacksmiths who damaged their eyes due to staring directly at the flames.

Luckily, Eiji's eyes weren't genetically weak, however, since he began to work as the blacksmith, his eyesight fell a bit.

Still, even without that, the people in Siena had clearly superior eyesight.

Of all people, Mike, who was a hunter, had undoubtedly excelling eyesight during the day and in the dark. Eiji was surprised at how accurately Mike could guess who was coming despite the target looking like a grain of rice from the distance.

After a while, Eiji could grasp what Fernando said.

– This is, aren't all of them made from bricks?

– Yeah.... To think that this was possible, just how many people and skills did Mostori need, I wonder?

– Certainly, there's quite a difference depending on each village.

– I too, have only gone to Tal village at most, so honestly speaking, I'm amazed.

In front of their eyes, rows of brick-made houses were lined up.

What's more, besides the usual bungalows, there were 2-story houses as well.

The bricks that were radiating with the light from the evening sun had a much more reddish hue than usual. Their appearance was beautiful and majestic.

Indeed, they are lovely. – Thought Eiji.

The European building structures which Eiji knew were basically made from bricks.

Still, there were lots of wooden buildings in Siena.

Eiji's workshop and the tribal chief's house are rare exceptions that were built using stones, however, some parts of them were still

using mud walls. Even Eiji's home had the holes strengthened with clay at first.

The majority of houses in Tal had mud walls, and the reason for that was because they had no carpenters with outstanding skills like Fernando.

If so, how many of excellent carpenters does Mostori have?

Even from a distant view, he could perceive the detailed texture from the wonderful brick walls.

The houses were lined up in equal intervals, and they didn't appear to have the smallest disorder.

Fernando caught his breath while staring at the stores and houses with a dumbfounded face, as if forgetting about everything else.

Was he looking back on his own works?

He seemed to receive quite the shock.

His clenched fist was slightly trembling.

Seeing that, Eiji averted his eyes.

– For the time being, should we try dock the boat and pay a visit?

-.....That's right. I still can't believe the view in front of my eyes.

– Same here.

After stopping the boat, Eiji moved toward Mostori together with Fernando.

Passing through the sand on the riverside, they walked onto the meadow.

Except for a single part between the riverside and Mostori, there were no constructed walkways.

The places outside the way were overgrown with high grass, which made it hard to pass.

Once they went along the riverbank, a small road was seen as their walking slowly became easier.

And then, an unbelievable scenery displayed itself in front of them.

– Eeh...? Fernando-san, this road is paved with flagstone.

– Incredible. How large of a labor force do they need to make such a thing?

– You didn't know of this?

– I didn't. Somehow after seeing this, it makes me afraid to meet

with the people here. Won't I become a laughing stock?

– No, it will be probably fine.

– I wonder about that. I might be laughed at for being old fashioned in building streets and houses.

Fernando's face turned a bit pale.

It was clear that he felt nervous after witnessing this sight.

As for Eiji, as far as he knew about the life in modern Japan, there were certainly places everywhere that fell behind in technology.

Nevertheless, after seeing lots of discrepancy between each village despite living on the same island, Eiji felt somewhat confused.

Why is there such a disparity in technology? I want to ask more details regarding that. – he thought.

A much more solid feeling was received in their feet from the flagstone road when compared to a soil-made one.

The path had trenches for horse carriages, and it was furnished with a drainage channel. One could presume that quite a high level of technology is present.

If there's something like this, then even during rainy days, wheels won't get stuck.

It was a tremendous result even for Siena that used wheelbarrows.

Perhaps, it wasn't possible to introduce this straight away, but Eiji wanted to pave the paths in Siena with flagstones.

As Eiji walked along the road while feeling admiration, Fernando suddenly halted.

There was a brick-made house next to them.

Staring fixedly at its wall, Fernando didn't move, as if being glued.

– What's the matter?

– No, this building, its construction method is subtly different from what I know.

– How is that?

– Yeah. I usually change the way I arrange stones depending on the steps. If the bottom steps are short, the upper steps will become long. However, this building uses the same steps to alternate the length, allowing them to use long and short bricks in turns.^[1]

– Which method is better?

–Well, til now, I've followed the methods of our great pioneers.

I've wanted to try different methods at least once, but.....

Drawing close the house, Fernando touched the bricks repeatedly.

Hm – putting his effort into that, groaning, and gazing at the whole building from various angles, Fernando completely devoted himself to his observations.

But, for Eiji, who was looking from the side, even if he understood Fernando's feelings, he couldn't appreciate them.

That's because he wondered when Fernando was going to finish.

Just the thought of being seen like this made him embarrassed.

– Shouldn't we look for the tribal chief's house?

– Hm, that would probably be the one over there. As noticeable as it can be, it's the largest 2-story house here. What's more, there's a storehouse used for carriages next to it.

– I see.

– So, won't you let me inspect this for a little bit longer?

– No no, in that case, let's talk with the tribal chief and see the interior of his house.

– I guess, it would be so. You've said something agreeable just now.

Having a cheerful attitude, he consented to Eiji's idea.

It appears that Fernando loses his composure whenever it's about drinking alcohol or getting in touch with new construction technology.

This needed more special attention from now on.

At Fernando, who went in a running manner as if wanting to see the house as fast as possible, Eiji made a wry smile while moving toward what apparently was the house of the tribal chief.

The person that came out to greet them was a handsome man with blond hair; big, blue eyes; and a distinctive bridge on his nose.

Even Fernando, who was a handsome man, competed for first place in Siena; nevertheless, in front of this tribal chief, he was just a shadow.

Not to mention, his neat clothes probably took a part in giving that impression of his.

The man's surprisingly luxurious cotton shirt, hemp-made vest, and hemp-made trousers made him look composed.

Exchanging a firm handshake with Fernando and Eiji, the man bore

his shining white teeth as he introduced himself.

– Oh my, so you came from a distant place. I am the grandchild of the great tribal chief of Mostori and my glorious grandfather, Pierro, the son of the great Pierro, and again, the person that is this village current tribal chief, Pierro.

– I am the blacksmith of Siena, Eiji.

– It's Fernando. I'm in charge Siena's trade and carpentry. We are sincerely grateful for having you welcome us even though we are the sudden visitors this time. There are no words to describe our gratitude for your kindness. I apologize for this rush, but is it fine for us to leave at least our luggage here?

– Yes, I don't mind. By the way, the name Pierro is simply the result of my succession to it. It might be puzzling for you, so please forgive me. The name was decided by the consensus of everyone in this village so as not to forget about the great deeds of my grandfather and father. If it suits you, you can call me Pierro the third instead.

Pierro explained, while moving his body in a wriggling manner. His look was of unusual beauty, however, his conduct was somewhat girlish.

The two of them were guided outside the house.

– Actually, unlike other villages, this village has a guest house specially prepared for visitors. You might be troubled as it may not be as convenient as you wish, but I believe the security here is exceptional, and that it's reasonably comfortable. I hope for you to enjoy your time here in peace.

The place to which Pierro guided them was a house next to his. It was a bit smaller than the tribal chief's house. Still, it was a considerably spacious 2-story building.

On the ground floor, in the right corner, there was a storehouse for carriages, whereas on its left side, the entrance.

– Well then, I'd like for you to leave your luggage there and have a rest. I'll prepare a welcome banquet for you.

After Pierro had left the room, Fernando and Eiji took a short rest. They were already too surprised to breath out a sigh.

- Looks like, this is used for guests.
- Unlike ours, this one is way different, right?....Haha, I can only laugh.

Placing his luggage inside the chest, Eiji looked around the room.

The inside of the room was clean and spacious.

It was probably bright during the daytime since the room had a big louver door installed.

Also, there was a candle stand filled with oil to the brim, making it possible for them to stay awake till the late at night.

And again, the bed wasn't a floor-type bed, but the one made from a wooden framework.

To their surprise, on top of the bed, there was a cotton mattress laid.

Having already spent around 1 year here, Eiji too, had become a bit more familiar with the evaluation of things in this world.

Considering it in that way, how much of a luxury it is to have cotton used for a mattress?

Just pondering about that made his head dizzy.

To think that this many things are intended for visitors who don't come here every day.

– Eiji-kun, I'm honestly scared.

– So am I.

Being already in a state of total astonishment, the two of them recalled the feeling anxiety.

Notes

[1]: As Ace suggested, the steps are probably the laying order. The steps are alternated so that no two bricks line up on either side. Thus eliminating the potential weak areas and strengthening the infrastructure as a whole.

Chapter 61 – The Tribal Chief of Mostori, Pierro (middle part)

Eiji sat on the bed. Despite it producing a creaking sound, the elasticity coming from the cotton bounced back to him.

...It's really using cotton. Incredible. Just how much of their stock did they have to use? – he thought.

The last time Eiji was able to properly feel a cotton mattress was when he was still living in Japan. In other words, a year ago.

Eiji had already prepared himself for the fact that he may not return to his standard life in modern Japan, however, he didn't expect to be able to touch this unexpected thing in an unexpected place.

He looked around inside the room once again.

Just how frequently has this lodging been used?

Since it was used to receive visitors, there was nothing better than making it as extravagant as possible; nevertheless, this place was quite luxurious.

Dropping on his own bed, Fernando deeply inhaled his breath and rolled on it.

Eiji thought that Fernando acted like a kid, still, he would probably do the same, were he alone inside the room.

For a while, the two of them rested their bodies without uttering a word.

Their bodies, which weren't familiar to boat trips, felt very relaxed.

In comparison to a straw bed, this one was overwhelmingly captivating.

If only I can bring this back, Tanya will probably be glad. – he thought.

Eiji wondered whether he could replenish the stock with the cotton at the time he would be doing business with Pierro,

When it comes to this much, he may have to exchange a considerable amount of tools.

Obviously, because it was intended for his personal use, he would have to pay using his own items.

It would most likely become quite an expenditure.

No, it should be necessary at the time their child will be born.

Mumumu – At the troubled Eiji, Fernando, who unaware of the circumstances, asked him with a strange expression.

– What’s the matter?

– No. This bed feels incredible, so I was thinking about wanting to have it for my household.

– Well, if it’s Eiji-kun, then can’t you do it? If you present them the hoes and knives, you might understand the value of the cotton even if it’s a bit expensive.

– I guess you’re right.

For Eiji, there were things he wanted to lay his hands on.

These were great quantities of salt and saltwater fishes.

As long as they continue going downstream, it will be natural for them to reach open water in the end.

In the first place, Siena can only get a minimum of the necessary salt in their hands.

As the salt produced by the villages near the seaside continues to be traded between each village, its value rapidly increases.

Salt is required in vast amounts for food preservation during the winter time; nevertheless, it’s also a daily necessity.

Because of that, salt is regarded as a high grade product.

Naturally, it also works reversely.

For Siena, leather is a material that can be easily obtained, but the closer to the open waters it’s trade is, the more steep the price becomes.

However, the villages near the open waters should be able to exchange the amount they need for only several tenths of the salt Siena desires to have.^[1]

And then, once Eiji obtains the salt, he planned to use them for various things while being aware that they might fail.

However, that plan too, probably needed to be given up on.

– Whatever we do, we first have to ask them how much they’re willing to share the cotton with us.

– Yeah, shall we go soon?

– Yes, by the way, Fernando-san.

- Hm?
 - I'm not sure if it's going to be today or tomorrow, but, can I have you leave the negotiations to me?
-

Eiji couldn't forget about his bitter experience.

That was back when he had the negotiation with Franko.

Even now, Eiji wouldn't consider that time as his mistake.

Having to deal while being overwhelmed by the difference of information, Eiji was able to defend the minimum without crossing the line.

Still, the fact he was one-sidedly dominated remains.

Originally, Fernando was in charge of trade.

Carrying out the task as the village's representative, he also established a friendly relationship with Girolamo.

His trade capability should be at least standard.

That's why, if one has to make a fast decision, it's wiser to entrust Fernando with that job.

However, the reason why Eiji wanted to participate during this time's trade wasn't solely due to him being the initiator.

Using his wisdom and skills as an effective triumph card, Eiji's aim was to gain more experience in negotiations.

He didn't let anyone know what he thought, neither through his words nor his expression, he had been hiding it all the time.

Otherwise, the period of him being deceived won't end.

The next time I confront Franko, I'll produce a result that will surpass him. –

Eiji thought as he breathed out his high spirit.

– Oh my, were you able to enjoy your time?

– Thank you very much. It is a splendid room.

– Then, I'm glad. This place is the pride of our village. You see, recently, visitors have become acquainted to this place, but as expected, seeing new visitors like you becoming surprised makes me happy.

By the time Eiji and Fernando visited Pierro's house once more, the inside of the room was lit by a fire, and an aroma of delicious cooking was rising into the air.

Apart from Pierro, there were 3 beautiful women, all of which were at blooming age.

It seemed that they were all Pierro's wives.

At first, Eiji thought it was due to Pierro being fond of women, but after hearing that the 3 of them were widows, he changed his thoughts.

Even being with widows has its difficulties.

Once they become the wives of a tribal chief, it's possible for them to live together by using their own and the tribal chief's status. Perhaps, it's type of a relief measure.

– Well then, please sit. We give thanks to god for bringing us this glorious chance of encountering you today as our visitors from far away

– Bon appétit.

The wine was poured.

Here too, it's different? – Eiji thought as he checked the taste of the wine.

In Tal village, the wine had more acidity; nonetheless, in Mostori, it was noticeably sweeter.

Not to mention, despite Eiji savoring the alcohol a bit, it seemed to be strong. Was that alone due to the alcohol being well fermented?

It will be bad if I drink a lot. Since I'm not good with beverages, I better refrain from that. – He thought.

While Eiji decided to only moisten his lips with the wine, on the other hand, Fernando was gulping it down.

He had been drinking continuously for the past few days, but Eiji's worry was probably a needless one as Fernando didn't seem to fall into alcoholism.

He didn't even get drunk for the past 2 days. Eiji envied Fernando for being able to hold his liquor well.

– Oh my, could it be that Eiji-san can't drink much?

– I'm not strong with alcohol.

– Is that so? Then, how about some ale? You can probably cope with this easily.

– Thank you very much. Still, this white bread is delicious, isn't it?

– It appears to be using yogurt from a goat. As for why this bread is soft...

- ...It would be the effect of fermentation, I guess.
- Fermentation?
- No, please don't mind. I was talking to myself.

Pierro's eyes were shining while goggling at Eiji, however, Eiji himself could only let his wry smile show.

Even if he was to explain about germs and microorganism, Pierro probably wouldn't understand.

There's also no gain in being treated like as an eccentric.

In that case, it would be much better to give the impression of being someone who possesses a wisdom unknown to others.

At Eiji's ambiguous reply, Pierro didn't poke his nose further into that matter.

– More importantly, Pierro-san. According to what you said, your grandfather, Pierro-san, was quite an excellent person. Unfortunately, I'm not well informed about Mostori, so can I hear the story?

– Yes, that's true. I would like you to listen. Til the generation of my grandfather, Mostori had no characteristics....no, rather than that, it was a poor village with infertile soil and the trait of harsh living condition.

– Poor...? It doesn't appear as such.

– It seems that people here used to barely survive each year without being contented with wheat. But! My grandfather wouldn't let it end like that.

As Pierro continued to talk about the past of the village, his tone began to fill with passion.

Probably, everyone would do so when talking about oneself and one's village's past.

– On a certain year, due to the shortage of crops, my grandfather went to the neighboring villages for a trade in order to replenish the stocks in the village. Despite there being two neighboring villages trading with the same item, the exchanged amounts were different. One side had a large quantity, whereas, another had a scarce number. At that time my grandfather seemed to have notice: 'Even if we don't produce anything, can't we become wealthy by supplying

different villages with items stocked from some other places?’

– So it began with that?

– That’s right. Despite the business being small, it all began with grandfather’s awareness. After he gained the trust from every village, he established a starting point in trade. It would be fine to say that our village stopped starving thanks to him. For that reason, he’s called the father of trade.

– Indeed, he was an amazing person.

– Yes. However, it wasn’t just thanks to grandfather’s influence, but also my father’s cooperation.

– What do you mean?

– My father made further developments of my grandfather’s methods. He improved carts used for trade and made it easier for horses to pull them. And then, he turned the trade that was solely performed by my grandfather into this village’s main industry and established the group of peddlers. With that, it was possible to carry our trade on this whole island. So as to make every village function efficiently and allow transport to all areas, he decided to set up outlets.

– That’s truly amazing....

One couldn’t help but to say that Pierro’s father was periodically one or two steps ahead.

Even if you were to gather everyone in Siena, there were probably not many who could think rationally.

What’s more, being able to make constructive and efficient thoughts was certainly a rare talent.

– With just one thing, it was troublesome for my father to gain his achievements; nevertheless, he wouldn’t give up. Using trade, he created a surplus of manpower and set out next to develop the village. At that time, he hired only a single carpenter, with the knowledge of using bricks. And while he trained the villagers, he built solid and magnificent houses one after another, many of which are left nowadays.

Being puffed up with pride, Pierro said it naturally.

Indeed, considering the income from the group of peddlers, it was probably much more profitable than cultivating infertile soil. On top of

that, they can reduce the required time of labor and the amount of manpower.

Thinking that way, it was indeed suitable for Pierro's father to be considered a great man after founding the group of peddlers.

What Eiji was curious about more than anything else was that despite the group of peddlers reaping great profits, every village, who was their client, could remain stable after acquiring goods at its hands. At the same time, they were able to maintain their good relationship as buyer and seller.

– Despite that, there was no way for my father to succeed in everything?

– Is that so?

– Yes, his biggest failure was, how should I say, was the abandonment of road construction.

Certainly, there were splendid stone-paved roads in the village.

However, they were only limited to this village.

Eiji hadn't seen road-like paths in either Siena or Tal.

At most, there were marks of cattle-pulled tracks passing through, but not something that was arranged.

– If roads are built, the wagons will be able to run even faster than now. My father suggested that idea to the neighboring villages, and told them that by doing so they will be able to deepen their interaction with every village, but...

– He was flatly refused, is what you mean.

– That's right. In the first place, the problem of manpower was too large. The neighboring villages usually makes living from farm works, you see. Nevertheless, he wasn't able to convince them about the importance of roads. What's more, those guys would trade once or twice per month at most. Having hard feelings, they would refuse by saying that there was no gain for their village, or that it was bit too early. My father as well, didn't predict that, still, it's only something that can be actually done at once during a war when using a great number of people. Like that, the plan of roads construction ended inside the village. Once they finished the construction in order to show an example, they went into the red.

Despite saying so, the roads themselves should have been convenient for the village.

Especially, after the rain when the ways are muddy and it's hard to progress due to the wheels getting stuck.

Because Eiji wanted to pave ways so as to make the wheelbarrow become more efficient, he too understood the desire of making roads well.

Fortunately, it seemed that the villagers couldn't complain about public works whenever they were given enough rations.

After hearing the story of development about Pierro's grandfather sowing the seeds and his father growing a splendid flower, Eiji enjoyed himself.

Listening about people's past and the land's former days was like noticing a drama that had a plot contrary to one's expectation.

Even in Siena, there was a similar drama, and his wife, Tanya, probably had recollection of that.

As soon as I return back, I want to ask her at once. – Is what he thought.

– By the way, Pierro-san

– Yes, what's the matter?

At the time the story reached the point where one could pause, Fernando called out while holding his wine cup singlehandedly.

– No, I mean, I can understand well how praiseworthy your grandfather and father was, but, wouldn't you tell us about your life as the current tribal chief?

– Ah!

Shortly after that, Pierro grasped in a suffering manner as he looked up at the ceiling.

Seeing that appearance of his, both Pietro and Fernando were surprised.

Could it be? – Eiji made an expression written with these words while staring at Fernando.

– In comparison with my grandfather and my father, I'm very mediocre. I've thought about the next stage, but it will be difficult for my village alone to put that into practice, and it requires

time.

– By the way, what do you mean?

– It's a city. Putting away trade at once, I'd like to gather people from the neighboring villages and have them stay in guest houses. By just promoting this place, we would receive some income. The trade itself would decrease in profit, but the number of people and trafficked goods would surely increase.

This household is indeed superior – Eiji thought.

Their way of reasoning had a complete tendency toward trade; nevertheless, they would consider the development of their village properly and efficiently.

More than just the potential gains coming from a city, Pierro probably imagined how the lives of villagers and the village activity would prosper.

As soon the population grows, the traffic between people should increase.

It was a policy that focused far ahead.

– If so, what's the problem?

– Our village isn't fully independent, you see. We are still trying to persuade other villages to cooperate with us, but it doesn't go favorably. Well, I guess that too is just a matter of time.

Throwing out his chest, Pierro asserted.

However, just as one thought, will it go that smoothly?

There was probably a relative number of interactions around Mostori during normal times.

Will they discover the true significance in deliberate gathering?

Even if it's someone like Pierro's father, as long as there are no mutual gains, a negotiation will breakdown.

Presenting the merits to the allies in some way and making them give in voluntarily is probably the key to a successful negotiation.

Even Eiji had the feeling like he could understand that knack little by little.

– You, have brought goods with you, haven't you?

– That's right.

– Can I have you show them tomorrow morning?

- Yes, I'm looking forward to trading with you.
- That's because the fur and the knitting wool from Siena are of fine quality, right? I'll make sure that the cost of your trip will properly pay off in your calculations, so it's fine for you to have expectations.
- That won't be everything for tomorrow.
- Heh, what could it be? Is it perhaps the soap that Jean mentioned?
- Please look forward to it tomorrow.

When it comes to attracting someone's attention with iron-made products, rather than letting that person have time to calm down for a single evening, it's probably better to show the products at once.

Once the meal finished, everyone spent their time slowly.

Holding their beer and wine singlehandedly, they drank it bit by bit while munching on the cheese and smoked meat.

Pierro, who was surrounded by his three wives, laughed enjoyably.

As one would expect, was it due to Fernando not being able to call out to his wife? He would focus his attention on his wine while exchanging a conversation.

And then, the night advanced on.

Translator and reference notes:

[1]: Sounds strange, but couldn't find a better translation.

Chapter 62 – The Tribal Chief of Mostori, Pierro (last part 1)

Eiji and Fernando, who finished their meal, returned back to their room and went to sleep.

As expected, the comfort of sleeping was overwhelmingly different, making them sleep soundly, to the extent of not having dreams.

Eiji felt like he would welcome the next morning before he would even know.

He thought he would like to experience this once again.

The morning breakfast was prepared. Everyone smacked their lips at the soft bread and freshly squeezed cow milk.

With each of them being a high grade product, they were unusually tasty.

Eiji felt like he was having the most luxurious thing since the time he had left the village.

Because these alone made Mostori village likable, one couldn't treat a warm welcome consisting of a meal lightly.

Perhaps, Pierro as well, delivered this luxury upon understanding the change of emotions in his visitors.

Though aggressive, it was a strategy that one couldn't dislike. – Eiji thought.

Following a short rest taken after the meal, Pierro put a smile on his face and said:

– Well, I'd like to start the negotiations soon, but can I have you bring me to your goods?

– Yes. The preparations are done with Siena's specialty being in the center of attention.

– Understood. Because we have lots of products, it will be hard for us to bring everything into this place. I'd like for you take a look at once in the warehouse.

– Warehouse?

– Yes. We have divided specialties gathered from every village into

groups. It's a pure masterpiece.

The place to which Pierro-san guided them was an unusually spacious warehouse.

It was properly made with bricks, and at the wall near the ceiling, there was skylight glass inserted, which was rather surprising.

That was the first time for Eiji to see glass on this island.

Indeed, I'm nothing but being constantly amazed.... – he thought.

Eiji felt like there's nothing that can surprise him anymore.

Despite thinking so, he prepared himself and entered the warehouse.

The inside was unexpectedly bright, which was probably thanks to the glass.

The area of the warehouse was spacious; nevertheless, because it was packed with items til every nook and cranny was occupied, there was not much width for moving around.

Dried fishes, salt, bamboo, fur, and spices, it seemed that various things were stored inside wooden frames and pots.

Among them, including high grade dyes and minerals, there was an iron hoe leaning against the wall in the corner. Just from where did they acquire the hoe?

Just with whom did they trade for it?

Eiji could only stare dumbfoundedly at this unforeseen situation.

Because unfamiliar things appeared one by one in front of his eyes, there was no end to his fresh curiosity.

It seemed that Fernando's eyes were glued to the bricks piling up near the entrance.

Certainly, he was now imagining how to build using them, or similar things like that.

Eiji himself announced his candidacy by telling Fernando to leave him the negotiation job.

Pierro kept silent and decided to let them be immersed in their deep thinking until they had become satisfied.

– Not just the variety, but you also have large quantities of them, right?

– We have gathered at least one specialty from every village, you see. There's no way for us to use them all. Most of them will be

shipped again to other villages.

– And then spread through in all places.

– That's right. Everything will go to all the villages, thus, there will be neither excess nor deficiency. This is the errand and specialty of our village.

At the time Eiji checked the things with his eyes, there was raw cotton preserved in large quantity and even its seeds were stored.

Even though things like these are basically not meant for sale, how do they collect them?

Was it because of the extent of trust mentioned by Pierro? Or perhaps due to his exceptional negotiation skills.

Eiji, who grasped a rough sketch of the warehouse's content, went outside the building and returned once more in front of Pierro's house.

Inside the cart borrowed from Pierro, Siena's goods were accumulated.

Since the surface was covered with a fur, the content couldn't be seen.

Til now, it was Eiji who had been constantly surprised by various things.

He too, had to grab a bit of Pierro's attention.

– Were you content?

– Yes. I'll tell you what we want after I discuss with Fernando.

– Well then, Can I have you show me your items this time?

– Unfortunately, this time's most valuable thing isn't the iron which you'd expect.

– Not the iron.....? Then, what it is?

– That would be... this.

As soon as Pierro saw what Eiji took out, his expression was painted with astonishment.

It was a lovely rainbow-colored fabric.

Taking the cloth in his hands, he observed it carefully and breathed out in admiration.

Its width was around a meter, and its length- 4 meters.

Even among the fabrics produced in Siena, this one was the cream of the crop.

- This is a cotton material, right?! Not to mention, it's big. Just how much time do you need to weave this?
- We are considering the production of this from now on, even if it's just a little.
- It's splendid.... What's more, this fabric was even thoroughly dyed. A beautiful and naturally cheerful color, right? Judging from my memory, I've thought that the only one capable of dyeing like this was Nazioni, but....
- There is someone who used to engage in dyeing coming from Nazioni, so we had this cloth especially made by that person.
- Hm. Certainly, this size and the appeal coming from dyes are not something that can be easily assessed. Even gems would be too cheap.

With the current methods of weaving, producing a big piece of fabric was unusually difficult.

Because of that, there were many clothes that would cobble together and become unattractive for display.

For instance, if one was to use this fabric, perhaps they could make appealing flags and canopies.

Also, because there were weavers built by Eve, it was possible to create big fabrics without much time.

And then, Eiji entrusted Katharina with the job of dyeing the fabric.

Katharina was reluctant at first as she originally planned to withdraw from doing that, but in the end, she accepted it gladly.

This fabric will probably become an effective material for trade.

It was an article which concerned lots of people in the village, and was filled with feelings of its makers.

Eiji wanted to sell it at the highest price possible.

- And then, this is the new alcohol that we have begun to produce in our village.
- Heh, Can I have a sip of it?
- Yes, go ahead. But first, please take a small dose of it so as not to be startled.
- Yes?Oh! It's spicy!

Pierro held a strong interest toward the distilled alcohol.

He became responsive to the changes in Siena as he would gladly stare at the tools, savor the taste of the alcohol, and praise the fabric while earnestly checking it in his hands.

His eyes were probably more discerning than anyone else's on this island when assessing things.

And more than Eiji, who had introduced various things, it looked like Pierro noticed the importance of these changes much further.

– Well then, like this, will it be fine if I conclude our business today?

– Please.

Actually, it was a satisfactory business.

Things like fish sauce and honey, which couldn't be normally attained, were easily obtainable in this village.

As for Eiji, he was able to lay his hands on his personally desired raw cotton, which was enough to possibly make a thin mattress.

Were he to make a fluffy mattress like the one in this village, he would have to repeat the dealing 2-3 more times, however, Eiji decided to keep his wish for a later occasion.

He couldn't suppress his unintentional expression of being pleased with himself.

Reversely, Pierro maintained his composure while putting up a smile.

Ah, no good no good. My expression is showing through. I've got to brace myself. – Eiji thought.

Was he able to hear Eiji's internal voice? – Pierro wouldn't cease his smile while asking him.

– Eiji-san, apart from this time's dealing, there's something I'd like to suggest, but...

– What is it?

– I think you learned from the talk yesterday about us dispatching teams of peddlers throughout the island?

– Yes.

– If it's fine with you, can we bind your iron-made items with an exclusive contract?

– What do you mean?

– You can make dealings inside Siena at your own convenience. Regarding trade outside of your village, I'd like for you to sell us everything in large quantities.

- Please continue.
- Yes. We won't be taking more than a regular commission. For example, even if your product is exchanged for an unusually large sum of money in some distant location, all of its share will belong to Siena after the commission is taken.
- But in that case, Won't Mostori be the one to bear all the troubles? Wouldn't it be meaningless?
- Our village can demand gratitude in exchange. Again, just as what my grandfather and father were aiming for, it will be possible for both buyers and sellers to gain profit from a trade.
- But in return, we have to sell all of our products wholesale to Mostori.
- That's right. Won't there be mutual gains? As for Siena, you have this village near the riverbank, but when it comes to a distant place, to begin with, for the eastern direction, there there isn't any intermediary. If it's a village like Mostori with this this many achievements, I think it wouldn't hurt to give it a try, still...

Eiji nodded.

I see, what Pierro says is reasonable.

Indeed, apart from Tal village, Siena had no other associations.

Establishing a new connection is troublesome, and in the first place, there's no way to reach the eastern side.

They didn't have that plenty of time.

Eiji looked at Pierro.

On his face there was only a smile surfacing.

Still, Eiji felt an ulterior motif behind that smile.

- Sadly, I have to refuse your offer. However much I would consider that, I can't follow your suggestion.

A crack appeared in his smile.

Chapter 63 – The Tribal Chief of Mostori, Pierro (last part 2)

Making a slightly cracked smile, Pierro instantly tried to reverse it back to a gentle one.

Nevertheless, as one would expect, he probably couldn't mask his bewilderment.

At the time Pierro uttered some words, a minor trembling appeared in his voice.

Perhaps Eiji's blunt refusal, alone, was a big shock.

– Just what is it that makes you discontent? I thought that my condition isn't bad, but...

– I guess so. Certainly, I don't hold any dissatisfaction toward the condition suggested by you.

– Then why?

Eiji was calm.

He understood Pierro's feelings well.

Even though it was supposed to go well, why?

Was it perhaps due to Pierro being confident about his victory?

It wasn't supposed to be like this.

Analyzing every movement slowly and carefully one by one, including the gestures, Eiji was trying to bring this time's negotiation toward profits as much as possible.

Eiji stated clearly as he nodded slightly and deliberately.

– I wonder what about the conditions that weren't proposed?

– The conditions that weren't proposed?

– For instance, I need to know when and how many goods I have to supply you with. At how much we should set the selling price? Where do I have to do the wholesale? And how long will this contract last?...How about all these conditions? You didn't mention them at all, right?

– That's, I think those trivial things can be added after we make a contract.

– After we make a contract?

Once Eiji stared fixedly, Pierro nodded.

It looked like he quickly reorganized his feelings and his heart was no longer swaying.

As one would expect, people who can make their living with a single negotiation called trade are different.

However many unexpected things happened, Pierro seemed to be able to retain his serenity within a short amount of time.

As long as his opponent shows a brief moment of hesitation, he will probably continue to push that person.

Still, if the opponent retorts back upon recovering, it will be Eiji who will sustain the heavy blow in return.

He couldn't make unreasonable requests nor throw out sugared words.

– I won't be able to refuse once we clinch the deal, right? Shouldn't such crucial matters be settled before we make an agreement?

– In other words, there's no worth in trusting me?

The pressure around Pierro rose at once.

Accidentally, Eiji wanted to deny that.

The saliva inside his mouth gathered, nevertheless, if he makes a sound by gulping it down, he will reveal the change in his disposition.

Haa – breathing out a sigh, Eiji tilted his head a bit to the sides.

– You know, trust is something that has to be built.

– *annoyed*

– Providing this was to be suggested by Fernando who arrived here together with me, I'd probably acknowledge. But, I met Pierro-san just yesterday, correct? No matter how sincerely you try deal with me, it's not like you can gain my trust within a single day. If I'm going to swallow your conditions, I'd most likely be acting rash.

– Hmm... I see.

Pierro nodded deeply and repetitively.

Was he able to understand? – after Eiji felt a momentary peace of mind, Pierro's expression changed completely from a mild look into a sharp one.

– Well then, what would you do if you were told to make an

agreement no matter what?

– Yes?

Eiji didn't understand the meaning behind Piero's words.

Just why is there a need to accept an unfavorable agreement like this?

– That's right, for example—what if I trust at you a condition saying that Mostori will sever the trade with Siena were you to refuse this contract?

–Are you for real?

– I'm the one who's asking. So what would you do?

– You're unreasonable!

– No problem with me. So what would you do?

Piero smiled.

If there's no trade with Mostori, the exchanging rate of items will rise at once in Siena.

Especially, one can consider it as being unable to acquire most goods from the eastern part of the island.

What should I do?

Yielding to this request will be a bad move; nonetheless, despite saying so, there seemed to be no apt move that will bring a turnaround.

But, why would Piero, who should value trust, make such a demand....

Oh?!

Pondering that far, Eiji finally discovered a way to break down this situation.

– I'll reply you once again, Piero-san.

– What?

– It won't agree to your condition.

– I see. Well then, it will mean ceasing our business with Siena.

– If you do so, Siena will oppose you back with all its power. We will report to other villages about Mostori forcing contracts. The relationship of mutual trust that you cherish, you probably won't be able to gain any no matter what. Can you see that?

– I wonder if it's really possible? Think about how many villages won't be settled if the trade with our village is terminated.

– Even if it's true, it will be fine if we cooperate with each other and create new outlets for selling.

How difficult is that idea? Despite simply imagining that, he wouldn't withdraw.

Eiji had the feeling that he would be forced into an unpleasant situation after that, were he to make a single step back.

Pierro kept silent for a moment.

His stillness was probably one of the tricks in trade.

Waiting for his next words, Eiji's stomach shrunk and squeezed while complaining about its aching.

– Fu....

– Fu?

– Fuhaha!

Pierro laughed in a strange manner.

It felt as if his coercion til now was suddenly replaced with a relaxing atmosphere.

Eiji felt like his field of vision expanded immediately.

Ah, guess I was feeling a bit nervous....

He lightly loosened his hardly clinched fist while opening and closing.

The negotiation will most likely advance favorably.

It seemed like Eiji was able to survive without repeating his previous mistake.

– Was there anything odd?

– No, I agree with what you said. Let's add more conditions just like Eiji-san suggested at the beginning.

– Were you testing me?

– That's right. I apologize for that.

– Please don't do that ever again when you test someone.

As soon Eiji said so with a sigh mixed in his breath, Pierro shrugged with his shoulders.

Supposedly, Pierro didn't have any ill intention.

– Do you know what peddlers treasure the most in their evaluation criteria?

– No.

– Humans. We neither care about the other party's prosperity nor

authority. What we usually hold dear isn't what we see in front of our eyes but what we don't notice. A truly excellent person knows how to stand up despite being caught in a dilemma. However successful somebody is, as long that person becomes depraved, he will certainly fall down.

– That's why–

– Yes. That's why I always have to test the party I'm negotiating with at least once, so as to check whether that party is worthy to place our trust in or not.

– tolerable for those who are being tested?

– It's just as you say. Like this, I apologize.

Pierro bowed down.

It was a flawless and admirable apologize.

Despite Pierro saying that he was testing, what would've happened as a result, had Eiji swallowed his condition just like that?

Considering Pierro's speech and conduct up til now, it was clear that he didn't seem make any disadvantageous push on Eiji.

Just like peddlers, who valued trust, it felt as though he held a minimum of moderation.

However, the condition would have probably become severe from that moment of failure.

– Eiji-san, we believe you are the person with whom we would like to join forces.

– Here as well, I'm looking forward to working with you.

Finally, while shaking firmly their hands, Eiji could once more feel the conclusion of the breath-taking negotiation.

– So what about the conditions?

– That's right. As expected, we would like to use your items at our own convenience for trading purposes. Saying so, we can only promise you that we will prioritize their sell to the east side.

– Well, I think it's very proper? Understood.

In the end, it was decided that Siena will hold the rights for trade on the west side of the island, whereas, Mostori village, the east side.

With the conditions regarding the initially mentioned commissions remaining unchanged, Eiji too, understood that Mostori was serious

about considering this island's development.

– If the trade isn't profitable for the buyer, the seller won't gain as well, right?

Saying so, Pierro smiled.

It was a refreshing smile.

After that, they added further, detailed conditions, and concluded the agreement upon receiving the confirmation from Fernando as well.

The content of the contract was recorded with a black ink on a wood block printing.

Pierro who didn't understand Japanese was curious about the letters, nevertheless, Eiji put his answer on hold.

That's because he couldn't predict what kind of influence will they make.

– Well then, shall we start make negotiations apart from trade?

– Apart from trade?

– Yes. For instance, how about the method of construction with bricks that Fernando-san was attentive about?

Fernando, who didn't participate in the negotiation just as he promised, only responded this time.

– You're going to tell us?!

– I don't mind. I shall dispatch one person from my village. In exchange, I'd like you to provide him with a place to lodge and meals. Again, if it's possible, I'd like you to find a woman that is ready for a marriage and can travel. That's because the person I'm forwarding you is single.

– I see. Understood. I too, will take responsibility and find a partner for him.

Eiji thought that it was a skillful exchange of conditions.

Nonetheless, finding a companion was quite a difficult problem.

Especially, if it's a village that has difficulties in welcoming outsiders. In that case, it's quite impossible to find a partner that can fulfill the right conditions.

Inside their village, there were already many situations in which partners had been decided.

It might be a bit insufficient to compensate for the offered technology, but because the other party wished for it, Fernando nodded without any complaint.

Certainly there are people in Siena whom he knows by personality, and whom he can introduce.

Like this, the dealings concluded one after another. At the time, they could take a rest, Pierro asked as if remembering something.

- What will be your request in the next village?
- Horses, I guess.
- If you need horses, there's a village called Auman. You just need to go south from here. However, that village...
- Is there a problem?
- No, there are none.
- Then, what is it?
- Eiji-san, by the time you reach the village of Auman, you will probably encounter the biggest surprise of your trip.
- Will it be something nice or something bad? Just the thought of learning it sounds scary.
- Fufufu, you will understand only if you see it, that's the fun of it. I too, was taken aback at that time, so there's no joy in telling you.

That's fine. There should be no malicious intention in what he says. At Pierro's smiling face, Eiji somehow remembered the feeling of bad premonition.

Chapter 64 – The Mysterious Girl

After taking a meal, Eiji and his companion proceeded on their trip once again.

The wind, which has been blowing down from the upstream til now, changed in a particular moment, becoming an adverse wind that blew from the downstream direction.

If one was to spread the sail in this wind, their speed would be delayed instead.

It was also Eiji and Fernando's first trip by boat.

They couldn't allow themselves to make the slightest adjustment in the vertical sail.

Folding up the sail, they entrusted themselves to the river's currents. The boat that travelled solely with the water currents became considerably slow.

- Oh my, still, we did some nice transactions back there, didn't we?
- That's right. It seems that Fernando-san too, will acquire a new building method.
- Yup. Personally, I think we obtained the best result this time.
- However, I wonder why did Pierro went through the trouble of testing us out.
- Dunno. But, he was applying that much pressure on us the entire time, so he probably had his reasons.

Fernando shrugged his shoulders in a giving up manner.

Eiji as well, had similar feelings.

What Pierro did should have been a dangerous move that could turn others hostile against him, were he to do it unskillfully.

Even if you cannot judge someone's personality, you will naturally start trusting them when you start making transactions. So, perhaps it's even possible to grasp somebody else's ability to cope at the time of dealing with a small trouble.

The reason, which makes me want to figure it hurriedly, is that I don't seem to have the slightest idea as to what it can be. Well, whatever.

– He thought.

Recalling the cotton that was tightly packed inside the boat's hold, Eiji smiled broadly.

The cotton which he acquired wasn't just enough to make 2 sheets of a mattress but also to weave a new fabric.

Currently, the weaving was continuing to progress the manufacturing process little by little toward the mass production.

Because of that, Eiji could forecast that his village will monopolize the production of cloths, such as hemp cloths and cotton cloths, from now on.

Making wool and fur, Siena is a great producing area.

Once they become able to grasp a single aspect of life's necessities, they will probably be able to get the upper hand in negotiations.

And then, there was a new material for negotiations in form of iron products.

Eiji thought that the future for Siena looked bright.

Shifting his sight toward the front, Eiji thought about the village of Auman they were heading toward.

Just what kind of place is it, I wonder?

In the end, Pierro didn't tell Eiji what he wanted; nevertheless, he gave him some basic facts regarding the village.

The village of Auman was the only horse producing area on this island.

In the first place, the village was surrounded by extending grasslands.

The environment was easy to habitate, therefore, it was natural for horses to gather there.

Catching and taming wild horses requires lots of effort followed by many dangers.

Despite these, it also had its good sides.

Half of the people in Auman would make their living by catching wild horses and domesticating them, whereas, the latter half would diligently do field work.

Pierro revealed that in the past few years, horses of unusually high quality had been raised every year, becoming a great help for pulling carriages for trading purposes.

However, apart from that information, Eiji couldn't expect that he may possibly encounter the biggest surprise of this trip.

Really, what is awaiting me there?

Eiji became anxious.

– Fernando-san, what do you think it is that will surprise us the most?

– Hm? Ah, you mean what Pierro-san said? Are you bothered by/about that?

– Even if I hate it, I'd be bothered, were someone to tell me that way.

– Well, I think you've got a point. Maybe there are ridiculously large horses? I can't say for sure though.

– Yeah, I'm also curious about that.

– At any rate, you will probably know when we arrive, so there's no use in worrying about that here, right?

– I guess you're right.

As soon as Eiji agreed with Fernando's answer, he switched his thought to something else.

Regarding the boat trip as well, Eiji planned to return back as soon they visit one more village after this one.

The last thing to do will be to trade for salt at the village near the seaside and go back upstream.

And once he arrives at home, he will have to steadily progress with the preparations for his wife's childbirth.

There were lots of things he had to do.

– Oh, the forest has ended.

– It's as you say. The whole surface is a lovely grassland...To think that such view existed.

– It's also the first time for me to see it.

A gently-sloping hill and a turf that reached near their knees.

Near the riverside, there were unknown, lovely flowers blooming.

The whole field which also gave the feeling of spring was fresh and green

– Hm?

– What's the matter?

Fernando strained his eyes toward the front as if noticing something.
Could it be that something was there?

Eiji too, gazed in front of him as if getting hooked.

The river continued to flow while bending slightly right.

At the riverbend/riverbank, tiny silhouettes of people appeared.

There were 3 people sitting there.

- Seems like there are people over there.
- That's rare. Are they fishermen by any chance?
- We will know once we draw closer.

As the boat advanced, the silhouettes gradually became clearer.

A single male and two females.

Could it be a wife and husband together with their daughter?

The married couple seemed to be bit older than Eiji.

Did they notice Eiji and Fernando? Standing up, they waved with their hands.

Eiji, who waved back, quickly prepared for anchoring.

As soon the boat halted, Eiji and his companion looked at the people from above their boat.

The three people were holding fishing rods in their hands, and Eiji understood there were fishes swimming inside their jars.

It looked like there was a limit to/on how much they could angle.

- Are you fishing together as a family?
- Yes, that's because, today, we have such fine weather.

At Eiji's question, the master of their house answered.

He had a masculine, sunburnt look.

However, one would look at the man's splendid physique that could be understood even from his upper clothes, he didn't appear to be an angler.

Were they just taking a day off by chance?

What's more, they seemed to be enjoying angling together as a family.

At least, Eiji imagined so.

- That's a huge boat. It's the first time for me to see a boat this large.
- We made it for this time's trade.

- Is that so? I guess, it's just as Fran told us.
- Just as Fran told you?

Eiji didn't understand the meaning behind that.
Just as Fran told?

In the first place, who's Fran?

Eiji run through the surrounding with his eyes.

Once the man called out the name, a girl, who was thought to be the daughter, slightly responded.

The man, smiled cheerfully at Eiji and muttered something hard to believe.

- Yeah, that was Fran. She told us that you'd be coming here today on the river, so like this, we were angling and waiting for you.

They were waiting for them.

Just how was that possible?

Could it be what Pierro was talking about?

No, that's wrong. The man in front of his eyes said that it was Fran who told them.

Then, how did she know about their arrival?

On top of that, 'on the river'.

Usually, the people, who visited this place from other villages, would use cattle and horse carriages.

In other words, using land routes.

This time, the travelling was conducted using a water route; that was unheard of.

Because of that, everyone in the village was surprised.

Eiji too was truly astonished. It would be fine to say he was even shocked.

He felt as though electricity was running through his whole body.

Is this what Pierro meant?

Despite consenting with Pierro, Eiji couldn't utter a word.

The special feature of the girl called Fran was her deep-red, shortcut hairstyle.

Her eyes were big and shining brightly with curiosity.

She was wearing a pair of trousers, which was rare for the girls on this island. Was that for the sake of making her movements easier?

Fran's calves and her pair of arms that were peeking through gave the feeling of her being a dynamic person.

Judging by Eiji's eyes, she's was around 14-15 years old.

Fran was still an adolescent.

Opening her mouth widely, she showed her smile.

– Howdy, It's Fran, Fran. Big brother, what's your name?

– Eiji.... I came from Siena. Fran-chan, I'm looking forward to working with you.

– Oh, Eiji? That's a fine name. And the Uncle next to you is?

– U-Uncle?! My name's Fernando.... Eiji-san is big brother, whereas, I'm uncle?

Fernando, who muttered in whispering manner, didn't speak a single word.

Eiji watched Fran.

No matter how much he thought about it, she looked like just a normal girl.

Chapter 65 – The Girl and the Horse

Unlike her appearance, the girl, whose name was Fran, didn't look composed.

You could say she was straightforward in her feelings? Rather than that, if one was to say it bluntly, her childish speech and conduct was what stood out.

- Daddy, let's take Eiji and Fer with us.
- I think we should wait., They probably still have lots of arrangements to make. Eiji-san, Fernando-san, I'm the tribal chief of the village of Auman, Dylan. And this is my wife, Chiara. I'd like to invite you to my village, but what will you do?
- Please do so.

Dylan seemed to be a broadminded person who doesn't mince matters.

There were signs of roughness on his expression; nevertheless, it didn't mean he was a vulgar person.

It seemed that there were many people who were mindful about other people's behaviour with a considerate heart that was rather hospitable.

- By the way, Dylan-san, what did you mean by saying it was just as your daughter told you?
- Fran? Well, let's talk about that once we arrive at my home.

Dylan put a smile on his face which looked like he was implying something.

If possible, Eiji wanted Dylan to tell him straightly without putting on air; however, Eiji couldn't demand more besides the answer he received.

Once Eiji and Fernando were about to carry some of their disembarked loads, Fran stopped them.

- As for transportation, it's fine to wait a bit. More importantly, your

luggage is huge, isn't it? What's inside them?

– Even though you knew we were boarding on the boat, you can't tell about these?

– Uhmu?, I can't!

Fran smiled.

It was a smile free of any maliciousness.

Was she trying to deceive them? Lie to them? Perhaps, she wasn't thinking so at all.

Despite thinking so, seeing her smile, it was hard for Eiji to believe in either Fran or her parents, Dylan and Chiara.

The cargo on the boat was basically stored in wooden boxes.

They were devised so that the stakes would be fixed in the corners of their wooden lids, and in order to maintain the balance of the cargo placed on top of them.

It was the result of implementing Eiji's way of using transportation containers.

– Well then, how long do we have to wait?

– Uhmu, he's coming soon.

– Coming?

– That's right. Ah, here he is. Gyusu! This way.

Jumping up and down, Fran waved broadly with her hands.

Soon, Eiji too understood that there was something heading in their direction.

It was a horse.

However, this was—

– Enormous! Fernando-san, were horses always this big?

– Don't be stupid. It's the first time for me to see a giant horse like this one.

– Gyusu is big. Isn't it, Daddy?

– Yeah.

As the sounds of galloping were generated, Eiji understood there were several horses approaching them.

The horses were unusually fast. What's more, the size of the horse running in front was undoubtedly standing out.

The first time Eiji saw horses from a close range was back when he

met the peddler, Jean. In comparison with this one, Jean's horses were one or two sizes smaller.

Still, even if his horses were to be ponies, one couldn't blame them for being smaller.

That's because it's clear that the horse which have just arrived is abnormally big.

The galloping sounds of the horses were like the profound sounds coming from one's stomach.

Eiji could somewhat understand the reason why the earth is said to be trembling whenever horses and humans go to the battlefield.

The horses slowed down, then stopped as soon as they reached close enough.

Snort – The giant horse breathed out with its nostrils.

It was a deep black horse.

The lie of its hair had a gloss, and its eyes were cool-looking, which made it give off the feeling of being intelligent.

The horse wasn't just big, it was refined as well.

– Thank youuu Gyusu.

– So this horse's name is Gyusu?

– That's right. Gyusu is the greatest among all the horses, the boss. And then, he's my first father.

– Father?

– Speaking of which! Eiji, have you ever mounted a horse?

– No, I guess not even once.

– Excellent. Then, mount one!

Once Fran was thought by Eiji to say so, she placed her hands near the horse's flank and leapt with her body.

Her stretching was so light that it didn't resemble that of a normal human. As Fran did so, she mounted Gyusu and sat on the saddle on his back.

Gyusu's back was of the same height as Eiji's head.

Being able to mount the horse without using any equipment? nor her feet, it didn't seem to be possible with human skills.

Perhaps, nobody in this village could perform the same feat as hers.

At Fran's instruction, a chestnut haired horse that was tagging along with Gyusu appeared before Eiji.

Seeing that this one was of normal size, Eiji breathed out a small sigh of relief.

However, as expected, it didn't seem like he would be able to jump on a horse without using his feet, even if he had no equipment on him.

At least, there should be some support.

– What's wrong, Eiji? Won't you mount the horse?

– No, after all it's my first time, you see.

While being reluctant Eiji decided to use his luggage as the support.

As soon as he stood on the support, he clasped the horse's neck to his chest.

Its fur was warm, and Eiji could feel the blood running through the horse's veins.

Feeling the elasticity of its unusually tempered muscles, Eiji mounted onto the horse's back fearfully.

The saddle made from leather was soft in comparison to a stool. Despite that, it had a hardness which gave one the feeling of uneasiness whenever that person would think about motions and impacts coming from a horse.

Fernando as well, fastened some luggage to his horse, which was free of ballast, before mounting on it.

Although Eiji felt regretful for not doing the same task before mounting his horse, he wasn't too keen on dismounting it and helping with packing the cargo.

– Eiji, if you are too frightened, the horse will be scared as well.

– W-What should I do?

– It can't be helped if you're not used to it, so how about being confident?

– U-Understood.

Just as being told by Fran, Eiji braced himself.

Please treat me well – Eiji called out to the horse while gently brushing its beautiful chestnut mane.

It felt as though the horse wanted to say that it understood.

With each step made by the horse, the place which should be

designed for sitting meandered delicately. It was a first sensation like this for Eiji.

His view was positioned high and Eiji was able to look across the landscape from his seat until far away.

Starting with Fran, Dylan and Chiara were probably also familiar with horse riding.

The horses were made to walk safely; nevertheless, Fernando and Eiji, who were still cautious, could only operate their horses at a walking speed.

Even though Eiji was told to be more confident, it didn't work that well. Nonetheless, was it due to the horse being clever? It would walk slowly without taking light of Eiji.

– Indeed, it's amazing. That's my first time riding a horse, but judging from the rumors, I'd thought it would be much harder to do this.

– Were they normal horses, you would have been shaken off by now. Our horses and Gyusu, which we brought, are special.

– *sigh of astonishment* Certainly, that black horse is incredible.

– Yeah. Whatever herd of horses it is, as long there's Gyusu, he will always become a leader. And before we even notice, the wild horses would turn obedient. Our village grew large during these past 10 years thanks to Gyusu and Fran.

Saying so, Dylan praised Gyusu.

Gyusu, who was praised, turned around his neck from time to time as he stared fixedly at Eiji and Fernando.

His deep colored eyes felt as if they were measuring while trying to protect them from any injury.

– Argh ! As expected, we're moving way too slow!

Fran jumped down from Gyusu's back.

Let's compete! – Fran raised up her voice as she sunk her body and assumed the posture of a crouching start.

– Gyusu, it's a contest.

As soon as she said, she ran with her full speed.

Fast. Was it because there was futility in her movements? Rather, her motion looked sluggish.

However, her body kept advancing forward, making her appearance

grow hazy.

Eiji thought about Fran's amazing leap a while ago, still, without a doubt, her physical ability was miraculous.

Back when they were exterminating wolves, he had a feeling that Philip's movements were incomparably different from those of a normal human, even so, it appeared that a part of islanders had far better physical ability than people from modern times known by Eiji.

Being left a little bit behind, Gyusu speeded up.

After the earth rose up momentarily, he shot off.

burst – together with a heavy sound, the sight of Gyusu's body became blurry just like in a photo.

The horse caught up within a blink of an eye, and then, surpassed.

– You idiooot! If you become serious like that, there's no way I can catch you up! Gyusu, you idiot!

Fran's complaint was heard under the blue sky.

Gyusu loosened his running pace, as if being troubled, and stopped slowly.

Fran stood next to him after managing to catch him up.

– Gyusu, compete with me one more time! Let's go, bam!

Fran broke into a run again.

Her motion was quick just like the wind, or perhaps, just like an arrow.

Once the horse shook with its neck listlessly, it started to run with the same pace as Fran.

Finally, Gyusu slowly began to lose.

Perhaps, he was letting her have the credit.

The distance between them became gradually wider with Fran leading in front.

However, she wasn't content with that.

– Don't be so obvious when you go easy on me, Gyusu!

At her words, Gyusu shook with his head worrisomely and gazed at Eiji who was far away.

Since you're the guest, don't you have any advice? – His eyes were

directed at Eiji as if trying to ask him that.

I'll be troubled, even if you look at me like that. – Eiji thought.

Chapter 66 – The Feral Child

Continuing their ride on the horses, had it already been around 30 minutes?

Finally, Eiji too started getting used to the horse's walking.

It was different from the boat's swaying and the instability on a bicycle, as these two responded directly to a person's control and will.

No matter how good one can pull the reins accordingly to one's intention, it's the horse itself that is entrusted with the final move.

In other words, the most crucial thing is for the horse and the human to become one entity. Eiji slowly began to understand this.

Did she notice Eiji and his comrade becoming used to their horses? Chiara looked at both Eiji and Fernando while showing them a smile. Ain't you two quick in accustoming with a horse? – Is how she praised them.

They both felt a little bit happy; nevertheless, in the next moment, Eiji and Fernando realized that these words were just a flattery.

- Darling, how about we speed up a bit?
- That's right. Fran, don't gallop too far away.
- Got it.
- Eiji, speed up a little.

Saying so, once Dylan and Chiara were thought by Eiji to suddenly operate with the reins, their horses quickened their walking pace.

It was an acceleration which one could describe as a trot.

As if being attracted, Eiji's horse also matched others' speed.

- *sound of trying to maintain the balance*

Right after that, the instability increased.

This is, tough.

Trying to match his motion with that of the horse, Eiji's body swung up and down while trembling.

I see, indeed, it is similar to riding in a rodeo – is what he felt.

Still, there was one exception.

The watching height was much different. Assuming a person is shaken off from the horse, he may sustain serious injuries, just like a jockey on a racing horse.

While holding the body of the horse between his thighs, Eiji tried to balance his body, however, because his muscles, which weren't regularly used, reached their limit, Eiji began to slightly tremble.

Riding on a horse with one's legs floating in the air was like riding on a bicycle without holding onto the handles.

Eiji couldn't believe that the villagers of Auman were able to effortlessly ride on the horses.

– Please wait a moment,

In the end, Eiji was able to have them stop for once.

While correcting the luggage that was piled up on his horse, Eiji took out a stirrup.

At the time he decided to buy a draft horse and go back upstream, Eiji thought that perhaps a stirrup would be needed.

It was an unusually simplistic item; nevertheless, by adjusting it in some way, it's possible to place one's foot on it.

As soon as he checked the condition of the stirrup, Dylan asked Eiji, with an expression that looked like he was seeing a strange thing.

– Oi oi, what's that?

– It's called a stirrup, a tool that makes mounting a horse easier.

– Hm. Well, I wonder whether or not it's necessary for our village.

– Is that so?

Originally, people who are used to horse riding have the tendency to make light of stirrups at first.

That's because, supporting tools greatly influences one's social position.

However, the true value of the stirrup lays in the easiness of operating with one's weapon when riding.

Still, shouldn't it be fine for them not to notice it? – he thought.

Because the stirrup is part of military technology, he had no intention of popularizing it freely, just like the weapons.

Eiji thought that it's all right to make them notice or tell them about

the stirrup's true value, but, spreading a new piece of military technology will only result in more casualties.

Since the population of islanders is scarce, it's fine for a technology, which brings happiness to people, to spread.

– Fernando, what's your impression?

– Hmm, they're great indeed. My riding feels much easier.

– Me too. With this, we may at least endure without having our thighs and buttocks tremble.

– Good grief.

Laughing at each other, they grabbed their reins and made their horses run once more.

– Wow, it's truly different. I feel like a crawling child that has finally began to use a wall when rising up. I can hardly recognize this.

– Still, you wouldn't say it's the same as normal walking, right?

– At this rate, I'll be even able to handle a horse at my own will. As expected, I'm interested in this. Later, can you tell me how it became like this this?

– Yes, you're welcome.

– Still, Siena probably isn't very familiar with horses, right?

– You're right.

– Then, how did you come across the idea of making such tool? It's truly a mystery.

– That's a secret.

– Well, if you say so, I guess it's all right.

Dylan didn't seem to be convinced, but, there was no way for Eiji to answer him honestly.

Being evasive, Eiji made his horse gallop.

Dylan's house was a long house style one.

The house was probably piled up and fixed with logs, however, it's exterior was overflowing with uncouthness.

The ground consisted of soil that was covered with cloth.

As soon as Dylan entrusted Fran with an errand, she immediately went outside.

Chiara^[1] poured a white liquid from a barrel into bronze cups and

presented them to both Eiji and Fernando.

And when they received their cups, an intense smell of alcohol mixed with milk floated in the air.

For some reason, it was a bittersweet-like smell.

– This is?

– A beverage made from horse milk. It's delicious.^[2]

-.....Bon appétit.

Eiji tried to drink it timidly.

Once the Makkoli-like white liquid glided over his tongue, a mild taste with an unexpectedly smooth texture was felt.

This is, surprisingly tasty. – he thought.

It was a rude story, nevertheless, after hearing about the fermented mare's milk, Eiji put himself on guard while fearing its quite intense odor.

Despite that, the level of alcohol in the drink wasn't high, and it was astonishingly easy to drink.

– Hey, you too, come and stir this.

– You mean this barrel?

– Yes, it's a customary practice for guests to churn the insides of a barrel.

Unlike the barrels that already contained fermented mare's milk, Eiji churned the one which still had the milk inside.

The milk will probably ferment once it gets fully in touch with the air.

Since his departure from Siena, it was the first time for Eiji to be on the producing side. Til now, he would simply be offered alcohol.

It was a simple, repetitive process, nonetheless, being told that the mare's milk would turn into alcohol once it's mixed, Eiji felt a strange sensation of enjoying this.

As soon as everyone received their alcohol, Dylan and Chiara, who were sitting, tightened their expression a bit .

Fran was still not back.

– Well, it looks like you want to hear more about Fran's mysterious power?

– That's right. Just how did she predict our arrival? I have no idea about that.

- In order to understand it, I need to tell you about that girl's past. It's lengthy, still, do you want to listen?
- Let's hear it.

It seemed that that there was some particular reason.

Well, it wouldn't be strange for there to be strange reasons behind being able to perform something mysterious.

Eiji adjusted his seated posture.

- That girl, you see, even though she calls me pretty much her father, she's not my actual daughter.
- Considering that, it seems that she adores you quite well, but...
- Adoring someone doesn't make a person blood related.
- I guess so.
- That girl's real parent is, do you recall that horse named Gyusu which arrived to welcome us?
- Yes, that amazingly huge horse.
- Only that he is of abnormal size. That guy, you see, he raised Fran up.
- A horse, did?

Sometimes, there tend to be years when a hardship, caused by a shortage of provisions, doesn't allow some to eat.

Being unable to obtain enough food, there would be times of tremendous famine where adults would even devour grass seeds as their last resort.

At such a time, would it be elderly, or perhaps babies, to become the first sacrifices?

Fran was probably one of those who were given up as a result of poverty.

- One day, we were outside to catch horses as usual. We would tie wild horses with ropes and train them. When we spotted a place with a herd, we galloped over there, however, the situation was strange. The herd of horses, which would usually be precautious and ready to run away, didn't move even an inch. And then, we noticed Gyusu and Fran there. Well, if we were to consider it under normal circumstances, then Fran would become a hindrance. Despite that, there was no way for us to abandon her. I remember that horse Gyusu looking at us directly, it was indeed an amazing force coming

from him. As the tribal chief, I was in charge of leading whenever we would catch horses, but that that was the first time I had encountered such a fearsome look.

Dylan vividly explained the situation at that time while exchanging gestures.

There are a countless number of legends from the ancient times where humans would be raised by animals. Such as Zeus being brought up by a goat in Greek mythology, or Shibun of Chu^[3] being raised by a tiger.

So was Fran perhaps brought up by a horse?

– How old was she at that time?

– Well, I guess 4-5 years old? Probably around that age. Back then, her feet were surprisingly fast although she couldn't utter many words at first.

– That was... raising her must have been troublesome.

– You could say so. However, at the same time, she could talk to animals.

– You mean with horses? It's somehow hard to place my trust in that.

– Well, perhaps it is, still, it can't be helped but to believe after you witness it by yourself. What's more, it's not just horses that she can talk with. It seems she can communicate with most of animals as well. Most likely, she learned of your arrival as well from the birds.

– For such a strange thing to happen, that's...

Eiji couldn't quite believe what he had heard.

Being raised in the present time, where modern technology has advanced, it was hard for him to suddenly believe in legends or fantastic tales.

But on the other hand, for people who were brought up among superstitions and legends, it was probably easy to place their trust in it.

Apparently, Fernando believed.

– Father, the preparations are done.

– Oh, is that so?! Excellent. Then, shall we move?

At Fran, who entered through the door vigorously, Dylan too, replied

with an energetic voice and stood up.

- Where are we heading to?
- Yeah. There's a rule which says that we have to welcome guests this way.
- I just wonder what it could be.
- Fufun, you will understand it soon. It's something you can only do in this village.

Being taken along, Eiji and Fernando went outside.

Numerous horses were lining up there, breathing irregularly with their noses.

And then, a number of people appearing from out of nowhere have gathered. It looked like every single person was hot-blooded and excited.

A man in charge of management was trying to sooth them down. Eiji understood that he was holding a large flag in his hand.

- When you talk about horses, obviously, it must be a competition. What about you, dear visitors? Won't you place a bet?
- It's betting, betting! Mum, won't you bet til you've gone broke?
- As if I would do such a thing.
- Oi, Eiji-kun, I'll place my bet.
- Fernando-san, have you forgotten what happened before?
- It only happens inside this village. What's more, I'm confident in gambling.

At the horse racing, Fernando turned a bit lively.

Notes

1. : Pretty sure it should be Chiara; however, the author used Fran instead which doesn't make quite a sense. Just bear it in mind.
2. : Also known as Kumis.
3. : There's a Chinese legend about an illegitimate child being abandoned by his father and raised by a female tiger. Apparently, the child would later become someone important (i.e the minister of Chu state: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chu_%28state%29). Although not translated(Japanese), you can read the story here:

<http://blog.livedoor.jp/hobiii-kingdam/archives/1017325683.html>

Chapter 67 – Horse Racing

Dylan pointed out the direction behind him with his hand as he stood in front of horses.

Having tea prepared and straw mats laid out, the villagers were now filled with the spirit of spectating.

– Well then, it's probably the first time for Fernando and Eiji to watch this contest, the so to speak horse racing. Which horse will run the fastest? Make your guess in the order of arrival.

– Is it fine to choose only one?

– Yes. You don't have to worry as long you choose less than two.^[1]

– What's the distance of the race?

– That's right, can you see the tree standing over there?

– Yes, you mean the cedar, right?

– To be more accurate, it's a Lebanon cedar.

– That's the halfway point. The horses will pass near that tree as their benchmark as they run counterclockwise around it.

A single cedar tree was standing in front where Dylan pointed out.

It was probably quite old.

The tree was high, creating a big shade on the lawn.

– Always?

– Yes. Are there any problems?

– A big one. Assuming it works like this, won't Dylan-san know which horse is the strongest? There's no way for us, who are betting for the first time, to win, right?

– I've thought about a counterplan as well. I say this every time, but we change the racing horses every time. Til now, only the strongest and most experienced horses have been chosen, so honestly, the matter of which one wins remains a mystery. Ah, and not just that. I'll choose only one horse, whereas, the both of you can name 2 horses. Even this much should be a big handicap. Also, it's fine for you to choose first.

After having a question and answer session with Dylan, Eiji consulted with Fernando.

- Fernando-san, what's your opinion?
- I wonder how much of information you can get from a single person. To be honest, I have no idea what the strengths and weaknesses of each horse are.
- Same here.

Dylan would prepare time for evaluating horses in a paddock-like place beforehand.

Drawing near the horses, Eiji surveyed each of them.

Even though Dylan said they were all the same, Eiji understood that every horse had various differences.

It was obvious that their fur color and physique were distinctive, however, even the face was unique for them. These were characteristics that comprised horses unlike humans.

- Well then, Fran^[2] will guide both of you.
- Please treat us well.
- The chestnut hair coat colored Rana has a timid personality; nevertheless, he's gentle and has fast running legs. The dapple-grayed Half is always putting on airs toward Fran, but actually, he's quick in his feet and has an especially competitive spirit. Half will always exert himself before the finishing line.
- It's easy to tell them apart with just their colors, right?
- Distinguishing horses isn't just about their colors. Basically, a horse that has a hard torso has the tendency to run a short distance. It also depends on the length of their legs, especially how developed their rear legs are. It might be surprising, but the horses with short legs are faster on a short distance. Well, Fran can tell which horses are fast even without knowing that.
- This is amazing.
- Well, I guess so. As long it's about horses, Fran knows everything.
- How long will the course be this time?
- It's of considerable length. There shouldn't be much of a disadvantage for any horse.

Still – he groaned.

Eiji thought that all the horses had glossy fur and looked magnificent when they lined up.

Just thinking about these big torsos advancing at great speed when

it's necessary made his heart shiver unintentionally.

The horses let Eiji touch them directly without being afraid of him.

As one would expect, among them, Gyusu displayed the presence of being the most extraordinary.

In comparison with the rest, he was one size bigger.

However, by no means could one feel any dullness from Gyusu.

Was it because of his footwear being properly tempered?

Rather than that, Eiji had a suspicious thought that Gyusu's thin legs wouldn't be able to support his large trunk.

– That's right. Then, I'll decide on Gyusu.

– Ohh! Gyusu is a fine horse!

– As one would expect, I thought you'd make him your first choice due to his size.

– How about Fernando-san?

– Hm, I'll go with the white one. For some reason, I've got the feeling that it was telling me to choose him when our eyes meet.

– Ran, too, is a splendid horse! He has lots of stamina and therefore, he can keep running.

– Then, how about that horse and the one over there?

– All of the present horses are great! Father wouldn't lie. It won't be strange if any of them win.

Ehen – at Fran, who throw out her flat chest, Eiji could only smile.

Won't it become a small reference? – he thought.

Despite him making a wry smile, he couldn't bring himself to scold the simple-minded Fran.

Eiji could understand that her statement came from the bottom of her heart.

Once they decided on their horses and returned to Dylan, he grinned broadly.

It was a smile of excitement.

– Then, What are you gonna bet?

– While we are at it, what's that over there?

– Yup, horses are our pride. If you win, I'll present you with a horse. However, not with an aged one but with a young one.

How about that – Being told so, Eiji was at loss for words.

The value of a single horse was extraordinarily high. Sometimes, it would be equivalent to one's annual income.

If one was to simply get hold of a horse like that, there would be no greater profit.

Nevertheless, when he considers the amount of his bet being equal to a bed made from a wooden framework, Eiji wanted to shrink back unintentionally.

Still, certainly, they arrived here to buy a horse.

Pehaps, the amount of the bet was reasonable.

– It has turned into quite a big bet, hasn't it?

– In exchange, if I win, I'll wish for something adequate from you.

– Like?

– That's right, having you tell me how to make and use that stirrup from before would be also nice, but... shall we talk about that after I buy that stirrup from you?

Dylan's smile was fearsome, however, there was a limit of things which Eiji could offer in exchange.

It should be fine to have Dylan consents despite Eiji having just few options.

– Don't worry. I swear on my pride that I won't request anything unreasonable.

Being told like that, he couldn't refuse.

– Excellent. Well then, let's begin! Has everyone decided on your bet?

– Yeah! (everyone)

At Dylan's enthusiastic shout, the villagers yelled back with delight.

It seemed that bets among fellow villagers were carried out publically.

Unlike in Siena, could it be that the tribal chief of Auman found a way to manage gambling without it turning into a problem?

It's hard to make gambling public without causing problems.

Perhaps, Dylan's management was, by itself, properly conducted.

As Eiji pondered, Fran, who was standing next to him til now, quickly

went in front of him.

- I-It's dangerous.
- Fran, too, will participate, so it's fine.
- You will?
- Yes! Gyusu's rider is Fran! Since Gyusu chooses his riding partner, as long it's not Fran, he won't move.

Once Fran approached the horse with her light steps, she mounted on him with her nimble body movements.

Because that her look was confident, at least there didn't seem to be any worry.

Upon the fact that nobody from the village considered that as a problem, Eiji understood that this had been done commonly by her.

As soon the horses lined up in a single row, the man, who held the flag, raised its pole horizontally.

Apparently, the entry gate and the finish line were the same spot.

Two thin poles would be separated by being raised up, and a tied up line would act as the goal.

Were they affected by the enthusiasm coming from the gathering place? The horses looked excited.

While gently brushing their necks, the jockeys appeared to be desperate in trying to maintain their horses' serenity.

At the time the flag was raised overhead, the horses took their position at the start line.

Gyusu was placed leftmost. Because this was a counterclockwise route, there's was a slight difference, nonetheless, he will be the closest the end line. ^[3]

His appearance was composed, and looked like that of a reigning champion.

Sitting in the place with the best side view on the goal, Eiji awaited the start.

- Somehow, it feels tense, doesn't it?
- Yes, the sensation before a race feels really good. You could say... that your blood becomes chilly.
- Are you nervous?
- Yeah, that's right. It feels like my heart is getting hot, even though I

feel composed myself, every time there's a bet.

– Gentlemen, please enjoy yourself as much as possible.

Once Dylan said so, the flag was raised overhead.

At that moment, the horses crossed the starting line.

And shortly thereafter, shouts of joy broke out.

Sounds of footsteps extended just like earth tremors as the horses kicked the ground while advancing.

It was quite unlike their slow walking path back then.

The horses running at full power were astonishingly fast.

Among them, the horse, Ran, chosen by Fernando dashed into a far leading position.

With its clearly abnormal pace, Ran created a distance of several horses.

– Gyusu is third right now. It's a good position, but... did you know?

– What?

– It would be different in cases of short distances, but a horse that has a big torso won't be able to maintain its speed on a long distance.

– Then, he is going to drop out?

It was a worrisome talk.

However, Dylan shook his head from side to side.

– Well, I wonder about that. There's no way for Gyusu to run at his full speed yet, so he might spare some stamina for later. How about we watch the game while acquiring necessary knowledge? Perhaps, it's much more interesting that way.

– Yes, please tell me if there's anything else.

– It's quite long. Horse racing isn't just about fast legs. When a horse fails to take over another, as long its front is hindered, it won't be able to advance however much stamina it has left. That's why a horse that's afraid will run at top speed from the very beginning and push aside the others so as not to be taken over, at the same time, distancing itself from the rest with its full power. There are lots of horses that will apply the strategy of "running away". On the other hand, there are also "insert in" types that will try to overtake the front runner on the last lap using the saved energy in their legs. Generally speaking, there are two patterns that can be observed in

the competition.

– Then, Gyusu has no problem with the leading horse separating from him?

– Well, there have been instances where Ran would succeed in running away like this, but... I wonder if it won't be too hard for Ran this time.

At the time they rounded the halfway point, the following group of horses were about to catch up to Ran as he slowed down a bit.

– I believe in you! Continue to run away like that!

Fernando lowered his head and put his hands together as if praying. Was his prayer not heard? The distance between his horse and the others continued to slowly diminish.

– A, Aah!

And then— the horse was eaten.

It looked as though a small fish used for bait was completely swallowed by a big one.

Fernando's horse was exceptional among those that had taken the front, however, the beautiful horse couldn't finish its running away.

It seemed that Ran was desperately running, even so, the following horses were fast.

By the time there was half the distance remaining from the goal, the horses increased their speed further.

The group of horses split vertically with each of them aiming for the front as if sewing the gaps.

Gyusu was—— he fell to 5th.

There was nothing left for Eiji than having faith in Gyusu.

Fran, Gyusu, I trust you.

He didn't hear Eiji's internal voice, but it didn't seem that Gyusu planned to remain like that.

Increasing his speed to maximum, Gyusu continued to outrun and be overtaken.

Eiji understood that Gyusu was running desperately as his characteristically long neck shook violently up and down.

- Excellent, you're going to be reaching the end soon. Keep running like that!
- —Win!

Numerous voices of cheering from the surrounding rose up. Eiji too, shouted without realizing it himself.

- Win, Gyusu! Fran!
- Leave it to Fran!

Whoosh – Gyusu's body sped up as if stretching out.

It was an acceleration unseen before.

The tip of his nose stuck in front more than the others and continued to stretch little by little.

The difference in the length of their noses would be the same as their necks or half of their bodies.

And then, he crossed over the finish line first.

- Yesssssssss. Fernando-san, I won! Gyusu finished first!
- Calm down!
- As if I can calm down with this?! Fran, Gyusu, thank you!
- I wouldn't expect for you to be this zealous.

Eiji hugged Fernando next to him without realizing it.

Once he calmed down, he realized it was an embarrassing conduct.

Eiji felt his head burning hot, and thought that his own face was probably flushing red.

- S-Sorry.
- No... well, you must be glad for your win.
- That's true.

Fernando's gentle words felt somewhat painful inside of Eiji's heart.

Directing his sight toward the venue, Fran and Gyusu went around in circles near the goal with Fran raising her hand in a winning gesture toward the spectators.

It looked like Gyusu's skin sweated vigorously.

He ran well.

Will he be glad if I give him some carrots later? – Eiji wondered

While thinking so, Dylan approached his side.

- Eiji, congratulation. Unluckily, my horse finished second. Guess it's my loss.
- Ah, Dylan-san, thank you very much.
- As promised, I'll prepare the horse for you by the time you leave. If there's anything you need for trade, tell me. You see, I need to arrange things in advance.
- Then, I'd like one more horse.
- Understood. What do you intend to use them for? Farming? Or perhaps, riding? Depending on that, the type of horse will change.
- For pulling the boat^[4], and then for plowing purposes.
- Good, I'll choose one with excellent physique.

Saying so, Dylan made a refreshing smile and left the race track behind.

- Ah, by the way, Dylan-san.
- What?
- I'm a little bit curious, but, just what was your intention behind organizing a welcome like this?
- People tend to show their true character when getting drunk or being absorbed by gambling. At first glance, you look like a composed person, however, I knew you had some enthusiasm hidden. Despite Fernando losing, he still maintained his easygoing attitude, so his heart is strong. Besides, horse racing is fun. Everyone gets zealous and falls in love with horses, so that's it.
- ...One more thing. If Dylan-san was to win, what would you plan to do?
- If I were to win...? That's right. If there is a technology than can contribute to development, as the tribal chief, I'll want to know about it thoroughly. Well, it's fine either way. After this, let's do some trading.

Dylan said it resolutely, with a clear voice.

Eiji thought that he was an unprecedented person who would suddenly force betting on his visitors, still...

Ah, this person is a fine superior. – He thought from the inside.

Notes

1. : Not 100% sure about this one.
2. : Fran sometimes speaks in 3rd person.
3. : The author mentioned about Gyusu being the closest to something, but couldn't figure it out. I can only guess he meant the end line.
4. : This one will be explained in later chapters.

Chapter 68 – The Saw and The Plane

A short while passed after the horse racing had concluded. Dylan returned back to his home with a slightly exhausted face.

His wife, Chiara, who entered together with him, brought them a dinner consisting of bread and cheese.

– Oh my, as one would expect, starting a feast is pleasant, however, tidying up is quite troublesome.

– Guess, there's no way to leave it as it is, right? If you ask us, we will help you.

– Don't be silly. There's no way for us to let guests help.

It seemed that Dylan distributed the bet's shares after taking care of the horses.

It was a bet placed by the whole village.

Despite each share being small, the distributed amount was probably quite sizable when put together.

snap snap – next to Dylan who was snapping his neck, Chiara lined up the meal.

– I'm back.

– Welcome back, Fran. Take your place quickly.

– Oh. Today, we're having a feast, right? Bon appetit.

– Hey, wait til everyone's ready.

– O-Oh. Sorry.

Fran, who had returned home, faced toward the meal and reached out her hand as fast as she could.

Did she reflect on her action after being scolded? Fran dropped her shoulders dejectedly.

Dylan lowered his head toward Eiji and Fernando.

– I apologize. I've tried to teach her manners for a while but it doesn't appear to be working.

– No, isn't your daughter adorable?

- She does nothing but exorbitant things, you see. The villagers won't mind since they're already used to it, but as expected, it's inexcusable toward guests.
- Please don't worry about it.

At the time the cooking was fully set, the meal began.

Fran, who was gobbling down the food one after another, seemed to be very pleased, making even the viewers become enjoyed.

Certainly, parents who have a child must be feeling like this. – Eiji thought.

Chiara, who watched over Fran with her gentle eyes, opened her mouth.

- Eiji-san, Fernando-san, could both of you please tell us more about yourself?
- About us?
- Yes. It's rare for people from so far away to visit us, you see.
- That's right. It's the first time for someone to arrive from Siena.

After Eiji explained about him being a blacksmith, and about his wife soon giving the birth to his child, both Dylan and Chiara became astonished.

- She was still single at that age? That's was pretty late.
- She had some circumstances.
- Well, truly, a human's life is really full of surprises.
- Yes, truly...

There was no way for Eiji to tell them about him living here for a bit more than a year since his arrival on this island.

He was evasive in his speech, but fortunately, the couple didn't inquire for more details.

As they continued to talk, Eiji became a little bit worried about the situation in his village.

More than a week has passed since Eiji and Fernando departed.

And on their return trip, it will probably take more time as they go back upstream.

The wind will turn into a favorable one, so it ought to be considerably fine once they spread out the sails, however, the headwind will only appear in certain locations.

From there, going upstream will have to be relied on animals' power, and perhaps, they can't wish for a desirable speed.

Not to mention, Tanya-san is still pregnant. It would be nice if she didn't overwork herself – Eiji was concerned.

Perhaps, it should be fine since there's Jane and Pietro taking care of her, still...

– Whatever the case may be, hopefully a healthy child will be born safely.

– Truly, the first delivery is always difficult, isn't it?

At the words of Chiara, who seemed to be experienced, Eiji nodded. That's right, Jane also mentioned about the first delivery being tough. What's more, there was a worry about puerperal fever.

Because the conception of hygiene was different here, perhaps, it was necessary to thoroughly enforce sterilization.

There was no way to deliver a child in a place which had a livestock hut built jointly.

Eiji asked various things regarding childbirth.

– Boiling hot water continuously and properly, and being prepared for a long delivery. What's more, a husband can't lose his presence of mind. Back then, I could rest at peace thanks to Dylan sticking firmly to those points.

– Stop that. I couldn't do anything, so I just remained silent.

– Despite that, it was fine. After all, giving birth is a woman's job. What I hate the most is when a husband oddly butts in, or becomes flustered.

– Fernando-san, how it was in your case?

– Oh my, it was quite embarrassing. I was unable to collect myself, you see.

Apparently, Fernando was thrown out of his house after becoming a nuisance during his wife's childbirth.

Unfortunately, Eiji couldn't learn much from others' experiences.

Still, it will probably become another experience for him.

Listening to the examples of one's failure and success, Eiji thought that it would at least help him prepare mentally.

– By the way, Eiji, might your place be selling scythes and hoes?

- That's right. I can guarantee their sharpness although there are instances where I have to repair them properly, but...
- How about plows?
- I don't have them with me right now, you see. It was too big for me to carry for my first business talk.
- I guess it would be so...You know, there are lots of horses in my village, so it will be helpful if we have many plows.
- Understood, I shall bring you some the next time.
- Is that so? I'm saved!
- After that–
- How about woodsmen and carpenters in your villager?

Eiji intercepted Dylan's words as he spoke ahead of him.

Dylan caught his breath and opened his eyes widely in astonishment. Bullseye.

Being guessed right, a smile surfaced on Dylan's face without him realizing.

-.....How do you know that?

- There isn't even a scarce amount of trees around this village?
- I guess so.
- Back when we were sailing the boat on the river, I noticed quite lot of trees missing from the forest. Not to mention, when you have to travel from here to there on a horse that takes a little less than an hour, it's quite the distance, isn't it? What's more, this place gives out the feeling of having just a single tree.
- Oh my, you've observed well. Then, the thing about carpenters?
- Even though this environment is few in wood, is it possible for there to be longhouses made solely from wood logs?
- I see, well done. We too, had a carpenter before, however, once he died from an illness without leaving a successor, it has been problematic for us.

Perhaps, that wasn't just the case. – Eiji thought.

On this island where the technology standard is low due to carpentry tools falling behind, cutting out nicely a single plank or a single beam is already a complicated task in itself.

Probably, scraping a single plank beautifully with neither a plane nor saw is quite a challenge.

Driving in lynchpins into a log, cutting it in relative sizes, and expecting the texture of the wood to be a straight cross-section, just how much futility must a carpenter go through?

– That's right, actually, we have a single carpenter here, but... there's no way for him to make a house building request this swiftly, you see.

– A-Ah. It would be nice if I could proficiently carve desks, chairs, and fences.

– In that case, I'll make you carpentry tools. Let's try it out in practice tomorrow.

– Can a novice like me do that?

– It will be fine. You probably won't be able to create splendid items, but I think you should progress well in making a fence. Fernando-san, I'd like for you to show them how it looks in practice tomorrow.

– *Nod* leave it to me.

The suggestion went smoothly together with Fernando's nod.

The only thing remaining would be to demonstrate and have them learn about the true value of saws and planes.

No matter how it will turn out, these tools will probably become worthy as they have been never used before.

Eiji looked forward to tomorrow's negotiations.

The next morning. After finishing their breakfast, Eiji and Fernando went together with Dylan to the front of his house.

Fran too, tagged along til the entrance.

– Well then, Fran will be going out for a bit.

– Where to?

– For a little morning run with Gyusu. We are running til the slope. Eiji-san, want to join us as well?

– I still have a business with your father, so I'll restrain myself.

– Is that so? Tell Fran whenever you feel like wanting to run.

Fran left. It seemed that in front of them, horses were allowed to run free inside a fence.

Eiji checked his piled up luggage,

This time, the majority of the items were left on the boat.

However, Eiji was lucky to have the saw packed.

– Well then, as for cutting trees, can I have you bring me to a place with good wood?

– This way. Come with me.

The place to which Dylan took them was a deserted house.

Despite that, it looked like the house was itself repaired with only occupants missing.

There was no way for the wood itself become a waste.

As long its surface is carved, it will probably still be utilizable.

– Then, please watch carefully. This is the saw that I'm going to introduce you.

– Fumu. It has a jagged surface.

– Ah, it's dangerous, so please don't touch it.

– U-Understood.

– Then, Fernando-san, please show them!

– Why are you putting on airs?

Despite making a wry smile, Fernando placed the saw on the log and moved it forward and back.

First, he did it slowly so as to show how it works.

Once the edge of the blade reached the equilibrium, the saw will move swiftly and rhythmically after that.

Small wood chips flew away as the sound from the blade continued reverberating.

– Ooohh! the log is being cut straightly, isn't it?!

– Fernando too, was surprised at first, when he saw this.

– Of course. How pleasant will the work become after you learn of such an item?

– Speaking of which, Fernando-san isn't the one who came up with this.

– The one who thought of and made it is this hard-to-understand blacksmith. I can only use it skillfully, you see.....eh, just as you can see, the log split in half.

– Amazing....Then, this plane is?

– After using the saw, the cross-section of the split wood will be still considerably rough. Well, Fernando-san.

– Therefore, making the surface neat and smooth is the job of the plane.

A piece of lumber will shine beautifully with a gloss once the plane is applied on it by an expert.

The surface will become smooth, and its texture will feel like it had been smoothed by a file.

It would be ideal to use the file for numerous and different purposes; nevertheless, there's no problem in displaying it for just a single purpose.

Watching the surface being adjusted, Dylan became at a loss for words.

– How……How……!

– Dylan-san?

– It's magnificent, Eiji! You, Become my son! If it's now, I'll make Fran into your bride!

– Ehhh!?

Just what on earth is this pops saying?

Was it due to Dylan being deeply moved? – He hugged the body of Eiji who was stunned and flustered.

Dylan was a robust person, which didn't make it seem he would be easily shaken off.

Eiji turned his gaze toward Fernando for help, however, Fernando waved with his hand in front of his face while making a disgusted expression.

Indeed, the thought of helping someone that is being hugged by a man makes one shiver, nonetheless, being a victim is more unbearable.

Damn, he abandoned me. I'll remember this!

– Is Fran no good? But, Chiara is my wife, you know. I can't hand her to you.

– Now now, Dylan-san. He's already married. Won't it be better for you to hold the tools?

– Oh...? Oh, that's right. If you say so, let's do as you say.

Dylan, who had calmed down, suddenly loosened his strength.

Escaping from the spot in a hurry, Eiji looked at Fernando who saved

him with his words.

- Sorry, it was hard to save you directly.
- No, I was rescued.

What's more, what he was doing would also become an advertisement for their trades.

Considering that Fernando did his best to produce a fine work, perhaps, it should be fine like this.

The only thing remaining would be for Eiji to do his fine job similarly.

Handing the finished wooden plank to Dylan, they made him witness its cross-section in practice.

A picture is worth a thousand words.

Dylan stared fixedly at the wooden plank that was previously a log while touching and making a groan.

- You do it like this, you see. Once you become used to sawing the lumber straightly and easily, you will be able to suppress the loss of wood considerably.
- Isn't this method hard?
- As long you don't panic or rely too much on your strength, it should be alright.

The biggest concern may be the possibility of bending or breaking the saw.

Whichever it is, it was an accident that could be prevented by using the tools carefully.

Putting aside the wooden plank, Dylan raised both of his hands.

It was as if he was trying to say 'I give up'.

- I planned this from the beginning, but, I'll prepare top-grade horses for you.
- Please treat me well.

This negotiation as well, was Eiji's side's success, is what he believed.

- Oi, for some reason, isn't there a rattling sound on the boat?
- It may be because the cargo has loosened. Fernando-san, did you

fix it properly?

– Of course. Well, go check it anyway. It will be troublesome if they fall into the river.

– I guess so.

It was noon.

As soon as the negotiation was concluded, Eiji and his comrade rode back to the river and embarked on the boat.

Currently, they were sailing downstream.

The horses presented by Dylan were swift ones which also took part in the racing.

One of them was called Yan, another one, Yun.

Both of them had chestnut coats; nevertheless, only Yan had a white head.

The two horses embarked the boat after following obediently.

Walking on the deck, Eiji headed toward the stern.

The rattling sound stopped at once, however, there was some sort of a strange presence.

Eiji touched a single luggage so as to check whether it wasn't loosened.

This one seems to be fine. Perhaps, the ones deeper inside? – he thought.

– How is it?

– The one I've just check now looks fine.

– How about the rest?

– I'm checking.

Passing through the gaps between the cargo, Eiji thrust his head into.

And then, The sight of the cargo's inside, which was obstructed til now, appeared.

—A girl was lying upside down while sleeping.

– Eh?

Thinking 'who it could be?', the identity of the person became clear to Eiji after a short while.

The person with the body lying upside down faced up as she turned over while sleeping.

It is.....Fran, isn't it?

Just why is she sleeping in such place?

Once Eiji managed to pass completely through the gaps with a trouble, he observed Fran at his feet.

It seemed that the rattling sound was due to the cargo hitting each other.

Was it because she tossed and turned many times? Her healthy belly became completely exposed together with her lovely-shaped navel.

Her girly puffs as well, peeked through, which was much sensational for Eiji.

– What's the matter?

– No, Fernando-san, won't you come here?

– I'm steering the boat, so it's impossible.

– I guess so. Fran has been sleeping here.

– Could it be, that you kidnapped her?

– No way!

This is problematic....

What should I do?

In front of Eiji who was confused at the sudden turn of event, Fran warped her mouth joyfully as she mumbled in her sleep.

Chapter 69 – The Village of Salt

Well then, just what should I do about this?

Whatever the circumstances are, Fran is the daughter of the tribal chief.

Taking her along while remaining silent might just turn into a diplomatic issue.

A precious horse isn't something that can be normally substituted as a working force.

There was no way for Eiji to lose his trust from Dylan and suspend their business.

– Fran, please wake up.

– Unyaa? Oh, good morning Eiji.

– Good morning. I might be rushing you, but I need to ask. Just why is Fran on this board?

– Yan and Yun are scared of boats. As long as Fran is with them, they will calm down, so Fran boarded on the boat and became sleepy.

– I see.

Her words were clearly understandable. Indeed, it wouldn't be strange for horses to become scared of boats when they had never boarded one before.

What's more, Eiji could understand her feeling of wanting to stay by their side.

He wondered how Fran fell asleep after that; nevertheless, it was Eiji and Fernando's fault for not checking everything before departing.

– Please wait here for a moment.

– Fran, is thirsty.

– I've got some water. Please drink this and wait here for a while.

– Understood, Fran will wait.

Fran's throat was probably thirsty from waking up as she drank the water deliciously while making sounds of gulping.

It also seemed that she didn't intend to go against Eiji's words by

wandering around aimlessly.

Having no problem with being obedient was the most important thing. Returning back to the bow, Eiji and Fernando faced each other.

- What should we do, Fernando-san? Fran says that the boat departed while she was asleep.
- How about we sail reversely back?
- If possible, I want us to advance as much as possible, still...
- Hey hey, aren't you in an awful hurry?
- When I thought that this trip would end soon, I somehow felt the urge of returning home. *sigh* I wonder if Tanya-san is doing fine.
- Again you're starting with that, even though I was thinking that you had calmed down.

Say what you want. A man's heart which loves his wife won't be affected in the slightest by such words.

Not paying attention to Fernando's blatant sigh, Eiji was thinking about the way to solve this problem without having to sail reversely back.

- Rather than that, how about we drop her off in the nearby village and have her return back on land?
- Fumu, even if she walks back from the neighboring village, it will take her at least a day, right? Certainly, that distance would be a considerable problem.
- It's probably so.
- Still, there's another problem.
- What?
- We don't know about anything about the village we are heading towards. Til now, we have been able to recognize the villages which we have visited mainly thanks to us approaching near the riverbank from where they were noticeable. Perhaps, the last village won't be visible.

Damn, even though I thought it was a good idea after going through all the troubles.

No, there must be still a way. It's still too early to give up.

Rather than worrying about the location of the village they have never seen before, it would be much quicker for them to ask Fran.

Eiji once again returned to Fran.

For her, the horses were probably more important than Eiji and Fernando themselves.

Gently Brushing the necks of Yan and Yun, which were tied to the stern, Fran adjusted their lies of hair with a brush,

Even though her face should be that of a girl, she looked gently like a caring mother.

– What’s the matter, Eiji?

– Ah, Fran. We are right now going downstream from Auman toward the village that has a dock, but, I wonder if there’s such a village near the riverside on the way?

– Near the riverside?....Fran often used to ride on horses far away, so there ought to be one, but mostly it would be near the village of Marina?

– Marina?

– Won’t you go there?

– Is it a village near the coastline?

– That’s right. Fran and Gyusu would often run til Marina.

Providing she rides on a giant horse like him, there probably wouldn’t be any problem of them being attacked by wolves.

Imagining the appearance of the small Fran riding on Gyusu to a far place made Eiji smile unintentionally.

– Speaking of which, Fran, do you often go away from your village?

– Yes. To begin with, was it due to Fran spending lots of time together with Gyusu and the rest? Whenever Fran stays at home, her head goes ‘arrgh!’, like this, so she can’t endure and runs a lot.

– For such a thing to...

Was it perhaps related to the environment where Fran was raised by the horses at her young age?

It seemed that Fran didn’t mind, but despite her being content with living together with humans, it was probably a difficult place for her at the same time.

Nevertheless, with this, Eiji came across one more response.

Assuming her parents don’t mind Fran staying away from home, won’t it be fine to continue advancing like this?

If one was to ask whether or not it was a good decision, they would

possibly disagree.

As one would expect, it's probably best to send her back without wasting any time.

– Fran, what do you intend to do from now on? If you wish, you can take Yan or Yun and ride back home? If it's the distance to Auman, it should only take 10 minutes by sailing upstream with the boat.

– Fran will go to Marina! Fishes over there are delicious!

– Still, you haven't informed your parents about your going out, right? Won't Dylan-san get angry for that?

– Uh.....I-It's fine.

– Really?

– I always go out without telling anyone,, so most likely.

– Is that so? But you see, it's better to tell them properly from the next time. Even if Gyusu is by your side, your parents are surely worried about you.

– Understood.

Seeing how Fran lightly grumbled, Eiji felt like this girl was brought up straightforwardly.

Once it's decided, things will advance quickly.

The remaining thing left would be to advance with the boat.

– Fernando-san, we sail full speed.

– Got it!

Receiving the wind mixed with the smell of tides, the boat continued to run downstream.

Eiji breathed in the air with his whole chest.

He could sense salt air in the wind.

Ah, it has been long since I could feel this atmosphere.

– What do you mean, by it has been long?

– Did I unintentionally spoke out my mind.....? Before, I used to live near the sea.

– Heh? Certainly, Eiji-kun, didn't you say that you used to live near the foot of a mountain

– I lived in amazingly steep place with hills stretching from the sea.

Once you climbed a bit, you would reach the mountain base.

– What was that? Indeed, a changeable place. Still, is this the smell of the sea?

– Fernando-san, is this the first time for you to be at sea?

– Yes. To think that I'd would be able to gaze at the sea.... You can't tell what is going to happen in your life.

As the river slowly zigzagged, it gradually spread and continued to lose its power.

They were most likely going to reach the sea soon. Eiji naturally understood that from the steadily increasing salt air.

– Is this where Fran usually arrives at?

– Yeah. Fran comes here together with Gyusu. Everyone would let us eat, so there are only good guys.

– Could it be, they would treat you?

– Hm? As a repayment for Gyusu's work.

– Was that so? In that case, fine.

Because Fran possessed childish traits, Eiji didn't know whether or not she would cause trouble by being from now on in care of Marina. I probably have to keep my eye on her. – He thought.

Leaving aside Eiji, who was worried like that, it seemed that Fran was actually content as she stared at the boat enjoyably for the first time, headed to the bow to check the front direction, and moved toward the stern to take care of Yun and Yan.

– H-Huge! What is this?!

– This is the sea.

– Ahaha, Fer looks so shocked!

– Both of you, don't make fun of me just because you have seen it before,

– I don't, but Eiji looks a bit suspicious.

As one would expect, seeing the reaction of Fernando, who made a big fuss over witnessing the sea, probably made Eiji deeply moved.

The smell of the tides, which stir one's nostrils; the sound of the waves; and the sun that gives a crispy stimulus, this place was rich with lots of variety, which didn't make it seem like the same island Eiji knew.

The sea was big and spacious.
It was the same regardless of country and place.
Such a natural thing made his heart feel at ease.
There were actually things that remained unchanged.

- Ooh! Eiji-kun, look, the riverside is paved.
- It's as you say. As one would expect from villages near a seashore. Shall we dock?
- Yun, Yan, we will be soon able to land! isn't it nice?

Eiji looked around the surrounding.
Was it because there were lots of people fishing individually? There were lots of boats as well.
With this boat, it looks like we can only sail til the coastal waters. I wonder how would a voyage outside the sea turn out.
While thinking so, Eiji dropped down the anchors and moored using the ropes.

- Well then, shall we, go and see the last village?

The erected buildings, too, seemed to be filled with exotic mood.
While disembarking the cargo, Eiji waited for the arrival of villagers.

Chapter 70 – Making Salt (first part)

The sea unfolded.

Reflecting the sunlight, the sea shined with glitters.

Eiji inhaled the intense fragrance of the waves rising over the sea, and held up his hands over his head while staring at the horizon.

Next to him, Fran tried to run with her full speed.

– It's sea-!

– Uwaah, Fran don't take off your clothes all of a sudden!

– Hm?

– Please hide your chest and crotch. You're still unmarried.

– Oh—, thank you Eiji.

Right after moving on the sandy beach, Fran was part of the way through taking off her clothes due to her overjoyment.

It was an environment where neither a bra nor a swimsuit was common.

Normally, someone of her age wouldn't try to become naked; nevertheless, Fran seemed to be different.

Eiji coiled a piece of cloth and prepared an instant bustle and chest protector.

Fran remained in a position with her hands raised, still, because she didn't show any resistance, it was easy to put the cloths on her.

– With this it should be fine. However, it's long past midsummer^[1], so you will get cold if you enter in the sea.

– I'll be fine. Yahoo-!

Slightly ignoring Eiji's piece of advice, Fran entered the sea.

She began to swim while pushing her way through the splashing waves?.

Ah, it's good to be young.

There ought to have been the same period of time in Eiji's life.

Just where did his vigor from that time go?

It seemed to be quite a long time ago.
He couldn't move frantically like Fran.

The stiff feeling of the hot sand, the flying seagulls, and the crying of black-tailed gulls.

The scene of a blue sky and blue sea expanded.

What Eiji held in his hand was a wooden cup containing juice from a common pear.

– She's one energetic girl, isn't she?

– True.

The person who spoke to Eiji while standing next to him was a man called Edo, and at the same time, the one claiming to be the tribal chief of Marina.

Despite him looking like a 60-year-old, his body was tempered and had an appearance similar to that of a man of the sea.

Was it due to his daily exposure to the sunlight and salt wind? There were deep wrinkles on the man's whole body, which made it look like a profoundly carved sculpture.

Edo laughed with a hoarse voice.

Perhaps the dark sunburnt skin did its job? His white teeth stood out once he laughed.

– Fernando-san, you're not going to swim?

– Yeah, I don't like it. Somehow, the sea feels scary when it moves up and down.

– Still, if you swim in a river, you should be fine, I think.

– No, I'll give up.

Fernando refused with an expression that one could describe as unthinkable.

Was his first time at a sea perhaps too stimulating for him?

Eiji smiled with a grin.

– Fernando-san, the water coming from a sea have a specific taste.

– Taste? Does it even have one?

– That's right. If it's fine by you, won't you try drink it?

– Excellent, let's try it out.

Fernando progressed toward the coast and scooped some water

into his hands.

Watching that appearance of his, Eiji smiled broadly.

Edo, who also grasped Eiji's intention, made a grin without uttering a single word.

- You might as well try drink it in one go.
- Got it.....*Cough!* salty! Isn't it salty?!
- Ahahaha, that's because it's seawater, you see. Seawater.
- Hohoho. It was a nice course of events.
- Eiji, do you enjoy setting me up that much...?! Rather than that, Mister^[2], you too, if you intend to watch me like that, please stop! Ah, my throat is...I need some fresh water!
- I don't like it. It's interesting this way.

At Edo, who asserted this nonchalantly, Fernando became at a loss for words.

Once Eiji brought him the juice, Fernando took it in a snatching manner and poured it into his throat.

After emptying the cup and sucking its remaining drops, he finally took a breath.

- Fuu...my throat is still dry. *sigh*, is Fran-chan okay?!
- She's all right. As long Fran doesn't open her mouth, she will be fine. After all, she's is different from Fernando-san.
- True. That girl has swum numerous times in the sea, unlike you.
- Eiji-kun, is teasing me really that funny?
- It is, but it isn't just that. Weren't you able to understand a bit more about what kind of place the sea is?
- Hm.... certainly, it's as you say. Nevertheless, I can't quite believe this sea is made solely from saltwater.

Fernando watched the sea as if realizing something. The waves were tranquil, and Fran stood in the shallows, which reached til her waist, while doing something.

Just what is she doing? – Eiji thought

- To begin with, the salt that we use every day is made using this saltwater.
- Hou, you seem to know about the method of producing salt, don't you?

- Not in detail. But, I at least know that you can make it by simply boiling down the salt water.
- I'm surprised. We made into a secret so that nobody else apart from the villagers know.
- Ah-, no. I just know due to some special circumstances.

Edo's eyes looked at Eiji suspiciously.

I messed up.

Even though Eiji didn't intend to have anyone be wary of him.

Finally, Edo gave up.

Perhaps, the village of Marina was taking on the salt production single-handedly.

Well then, how should I make him let his guard down? – Eiji thought.

– Despite being able to grasp the method, we live far away in the mountains, you see. Even if we wanted to produce salt, we can't since there are no seas in that region.

– Fumu, I guess that would be the case.

– Saying so, if it's fine with you, can I watch and observe the actual process of making it?

– No, that's...

– I think I should've mentioned this before, but there's no way for us to imitate your method from just its appearance. What's more, I think it will become useful for you later on.

At Eiji's strong statement, Edo pondered for a moment.

He understood that the risk of disclosing the village's secret and the back bouncing of the profits in afterward negotiations are in the balance.

Umu – Edo nodded after a while. It seemed that he had reached the conclusion.

– It can't be helped. You can watch if you want.

– Thank you very much.

– Hmph, in exchange, will it really become useful to us?

– I promise you.

Edo shook his head from side to side in a giving up manner and shrugged his shoulders.

The reason why Eiji was firmly obsessed with the observation study

wasn't due to him wanting to see the whole process of salt production.

When considering the attempt of improving the efficiency in various labors, the answer, without a doubt, will arrive at reforming tools.

That also applied to salt making, which was probably no exception.

In other words, he thought about trying to see through what tool would be needed by observing the actual scene.

Eiji's action was inspired by neither development of the village nor trade, but rather by his intuition as an artisan that happened to catch a glimpse of possible hardships in one's labor, and by his inner force that deemed it necessary.

It would be fine to say that he was aroused by these thoughts.

Once Edo took him along and moved to the seaside, an elevation consisting of a range of trees that looked like a wall appeared.

Apparently, it wasn't created by natural means, but deliberately in order to intercept the visibility from the exterior, at the same time, not making it look obvious to the outside.

It looks quite complicated, indeed. – He thought.

Eiji braced himself.

The method of salt production here was considerably standardized.

Even the level of concealment was much higher than in other villages.

As soon as they passed through the trees, a bank made at the coast appeared.

Inside of it, there were many large, empty spaces.

And then, there were villagers performing their job in front of the extending beach.

Edo directed a question toward Eiji, who observed.

– Are you curious about those holes?

– Yes, do they have some sort of a role?

– Right now, there are no waves, which can reach those holes, coming, but whenever it becomes a full moon, saltwater will flow in from that direction.

I see, so it's the matter of high and low water?

At the time Eiji guessed Edo's intention, Fernando tilted his head to

the side.

- What kind of relationship do the moon and wave's height have with each other? Won't the water come in every day?
- It's determined by period of time. The amount of seawater may vary depending on the date or even a single day.
- I thought the river water increases whenever it's raining, but, is it possible for such thing to occur?
- If you spend everyday at the seaside, you will understand even if you don't like it.

It couldn't be helped for Fernando to hold doubts after seeing the sea for the first time.

Being guided by Edo, they approached near the shore.

The shore was tightly packed with stones without leaving any gap and strengthened with concrete.

The sand from their footsteps was slightly whiter in comparison with the sandy beach a while ago.

Furthermore, it was clearly harder.

- As you can see, the sand that was soaked numerous times with saltwater have changed in color. What's more, the change in color only affects places near the surface, whereas the bottom remains its original color.
- It is because this sand contains saltiness, right?
- The reason for this is unknown to me, but it's as you say.
- The surface doesn't feel wet, but I wonder, how does it contain the saltiness?

Fernando's doubt was also a natural response.

It would be easier to understand if the salt covered all the places, nevertheless, was there some sort of principle as to why it only gathered near the surface?

- Could it be...
- Eiji-kun, can you understand?
- It might be due to the capillary phenomenon^[3].
- Capi-llary...phenomenon?
- What's, that? I've never heard of such thing.

Fernando and Edo put curious expressions on their faces.

Certainly, even if one is told about the capillary phenomenon, there's no way for that person to comprehend it.

Eiji nodded and decided to explain in detail.

– Whenever a part of cloth becomes wet, it continues to spread, right?

– That's, I guess so.

– Seawater that penetrates through the bank will soak to the deepest layer of the sand, and just like water spreading inside a cloth, it will scatter and pass in the direction of the sand surface.

– Fumu, I've understood til this point. Continue.

– Yes. The surface of the sand will become dry once it comes into contact with the sunlight, making the salt content that is within the seawater turn into salt. The seawater will again be pulled up from the bottom, but the part which has already become salt will mostly melt, without dispersing, and continue to gather on the surface. Depending on the repetition of this procedure, large amounts of salt can be accumulated.

Eiji, who finished speaking, waited for the reaction; nevertheless, there was no reply coming.

Edo gazed at Eiji in blank amazement without moving an inch, whereas, Fernando put an expression filled with astonishment.

This guy is again starting with his thoughtless stuff – is what his face was telling.

It could be that I've gone overboard. – Eiji thought.

Was it perhaps too hard to comprehend for the islanders here?

Eiji felt anxious, however, that wasn't solely the problem.

The level of difference in their knowledge was big, still, what Eiji said wasn't something that could be deducted to such extent by the islanders after logically stacking up their thoughts.

It wasn't an environment where people could ponder that much.

If they had that much free time for thinking, they would probably have to prepare themselves for tomorrow's activities.

Because of that, people who were able to perform deep thinking would be considered as unusually rare beings.

If someone like Eiji was to possess a deep insight or the ability to build up a hypothesis toward a problem, that person would have the

word “abnormality” embossed on him whether he wanted it or not. The reason why Fernando managed to be just dumbfounded was probably due to his trust for Eijii which he had piled up so far. On the other hand, Edo seemed to be completely overawed.

– To think that you would be able to figure out my doubt, which I’ve tried to solve for many years, with just a single glance.....
Edo’s muttered voice sounded a bit lonesome.

– Well then, it looks like we can shovel with this.
– Yeah, indeed. No matter how tough you say it is, this is sand after all. The pickaxe doesn’t seem to be necessary.

Trying to change the atmosphere, Eiji checked the condition of the sand and proposed the necessary items in their current place.

The “shovel” is also referred to as a “scoop”^[4], nonetheless, it’s actual classification remains ambiguous as it owns a changeable property that make its naming reversal even inside Eiji’s country depending on the west or east side.

At Wakayama, where Eiji used to live, a small tool like that was referred to as a ‘scoop’. Nevertheless, a problem arose when a client from the Kantou region ordered the making of a ‘shovel’.

The tool Eiji brought back after temporarily returning back to his luggage was the one called a shovel, which had a sharp blade and a pointed tip.

This time, it was to be used for scooping the sand, however, its pointed tips is capable of digging up hard soil, removing stems, as well as other uses for land reclamation. It was also now possible for them to transport large amounts of sand. Most of these shovels have been traded favorably.

Edo handed one to a young man who had been working.

– Oi, Rau. Use this thing called a shovel.
– *Astonished*. Understood.

The young man, whose name was Rau, had a sunburnt, masculine appearance, which was suitable for a man living near a coast. His curly, red hair drew winding curves.

Despite Rau staring at the handed tool bothersomely, he began to shovel the sand without uttering a single complaint.

He turned up and collected the sand mixed with salt, which was also called “sansha”, using his shovel.

Jaku – this sound was generated as the blade cut in the sand.

– Oh...what's, this?

– How does it feel, Rau?

Eiji loved this moment.

The astonishment of a user toward the result produced by Eiji's tools; the surprised, although short, voice accompanied with the joy; and then, the doubtful voice raised up as if being unable to comprehend the reality, all of these made Eiji smile unintentionally.

– Tribal chief, I don't quite get it, but, this is great.

– Is that so?

There is no need for the user to learn about the complex reason.

However, watching the joyful expression of the young man called Rau made Eiji feel unbearably pleasant.

Notes

1. : Meaning it's still too early for summer.

2. : Or Oji-san

3. : Or Capillary action. More info: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Capillary_action
I think the first sentence in wiki should be enough for understanding . _.

4. : Both are english words written in katakana. Apparently, the Japanese use these two words interchangeably...

Chapter 71 – Making Salt (last part)

The gathered sand was blanketed inside an unusually large water tank.

Then, Rau doused it with saltwater.

His whole body was thoroughly forged, and there was not even a bit of fat appearing on it.

The heavy sand and saltwater continued to move one after another.

It seemed that there was a thin pipe below the water tank, which the poured saltwater would flow through.

- It's the procedure for extracting the salt component from the accumulated sand. We have covered the bottom of the tank with various things in order to not let the running water mix with the sand.
- And you have to repeat this process many times?
- That's because there's no way for the salt to flow through completely in one go, you see.

While hearing Rau's explanation, Eiji shifted his sight ahead.

In front of him, there was another large tank, which, he understood, should be the streaming saltwater's destination.

Was Rau trying to convey his explanation to Eiji? They were in the middle of the process; nevertheless, he would move between places.

There was no way for Eiji and Fernando to stick to the work and watch it all the time.

Being grateful for Rau showing them, they followed his back.

- When the saltwater is stored inside the tank, there will be small particles gathering at the bottom. That's why, the seawater is actually used for salt making only after its top layer becomes clear.

What surprised Eiji were the valve and the pipe furnishing the tank, with a bronze pot placed in front of them.

The seawater would naturally gush forth once the valve was opened, such was the mechanism.

If one was to say, it was a water system which utilized the difference in height and depth of the water.

Below the pot, there was firewood already arranged and ready to be kindled at any time.

The whole procedure would advance semi-automatically.

I guess, we can't lose to that – Eiji thought.

Perhaps, there was a need to further increase the production efficiency in Siena by utilizing the dynamic force coming from a watermill.

For that reason, it was probably necessary to raise the number of carpenters and people who would engage in production activity.

Not being aware of the resolution inside Eiji's heart, Rau continued his explanation while pointing out the pot.

– The accumulated seawater will be next placed on top of the fire. As soon the water begins disappearing, closely packed amounts of salt will begin forming at the pot's bottom. The last thing to do would be to scrape it up together.

– It's an awfully big pot. How do you raise and lower it?

– It causes us much trouble. The last time we lowered the pot, it took us 3 adults to do so.

– I guess there were times you would consider making it a bit lighter, right?

– Obviously. However, is that possible?

At Rau who had a doubt on his face, Eiji nodded firmly.

– As long as the procedure requires the same durability of metal, it's possible to lower the weight by making the pot thinner with iron, rather than bronze.

– Providing that's true, it will become of great help

– If it's fine with you, I'll bring it during my next trip. As one would expect, I couldn't bring a tool of such size this time.

– I guess you're right.

– Shall we take the size measurement later? Nevertheless, because the pot is a little big, it will become fairly expensive, still....

– If it makes our job easier, we will probably be able to cover the expenses by producing lots of salt, so I don't think we have to worry about that.

- Oi, Rau. Don't decide by yourse—
- I'm looking forward to working with you. It's truly demanding here.

Intercepting his senior's words, Rau nodded gladly.

Since Rau was moving around the workplace? more frequently than Edo, he was probably pleased to hear about the work becoming comfortable.

Edo couldn't blame him for that.

It can't be helped. – The Senior breathed out? a sigh as if saying so, nonetheless, he wouldn't cancel what Rau had said.

Excellent excellent, with this, the shovel and the pot will turn quite profitable. – Eiji thought.

At Eiji, who was chuckling, Rau moved and brought a small dish.

On top of it, there was a small mountain of salt present.

Was it due to the salt being natural? The grains' size felt irregular with some being a little big.

– And, this is the salt which has been made. Won't you try a little?

– Then, I won't be holding back. Hm.... it's salty... but, somehow it feels like there's a bit of sweetness inside? Even though this should be the same salt, it's more delicious than the one I usually use for eating?

– Right? Our salts have 2 ranks: high grade salt and normal salt. If you cook using this one, then everything will turn tasty. Eiji-san's village is the furthest from here, isn't it?

– That would be so.

– Perhaps, this salt doesn't go far away in trade, I think. To begin with, people here rarely bring it outside of the village as they don't want to let it go due to its deliciousness.

– Then, I'm glad I came here to buy the salt directly.

– True. But, since this one was specially made, the cost will become comparatively high....

So, it this is the price of the salt?

Eiji made a wry smile.

However, the flavor of the cooking will greatly vary depending on the salt quality.

Under present circumstances, there was no established method of

selective breeding, which would determine the good taste of a raw material itself. Therefore, this period was quite inferior in terms of taste compared to modern times.

If it was possible to make high grade salt, Eiji wanted to seize it.

It was a pain for Eiji, but a considerable amount of normal salt was required as well.

Should I put this trade at stake for a luxury item?

– It seems to be quite good.

– Will I have you buy it?

– Fernando-san, what do you think?

– I guess if it's a small amount...

– You're right, just a little should do. Let it be. Please give me that much.

– Thank you for your continued patronage.

A firm handshake was exchanged.

It was decided that both salts would be stored and delivered inside a small and a big jar to their boat.

This time, it's the shovel, next time, the pot. – he thought.

In addition to salt and dried fishes, this side had olive oil as well. Just considering the fact that Eiji was able to observe and study in the place for salt manufacture gave him a satisfactory result.

The senior gave the impression of feeling relieved.

—

At the time Eiji went back to the sandy beach, he noticed Fran, who was no longer swimming, waiting for their return.

She was making a splendid carving from the sand hill.

Fran's fingers seemed to be extremely skillful.

Next to her, there was a bucket filled with seawater and numerous shells.

Eiji checked its contents.

He had seen Manila clams and Turban shells before, nevertheless, Eiji wasn't very knowledgeable about shellfish.

– What's up Fran? This is...?

– I picked it up! It's a mussel. There are tons of them at the seafloor. Once you lift and turn up the soil like this, you will be able to find

them immediately.

- It's a lovely beach, isn't it? And this one next to it is?
- This is a razor shell clam! It's delicious and munchy.
- This would be... an oyster, right? What's more, there are Manila clams as well.
- I traded? for it with the auntie. Eiji, do you like shellfish?
- Yes, I like them a lot.
- Is that so...? I'm happy. Let's eat them later!

Once Fran handed the bucket directly, to Eiji, the undulating water overflowed from it.

Eiji felt as though the tiredness caused by the negotiation was washed away from his body thanks to her innocent smile.

I'll accept these shells gratefully.

A smile appeared naturally on Eiji's face.

Night. In the middle of the table, a meal consisting of steamed wine, butter sauté, and shellfish was lined up on the table.

Besides that, there were steamed Pacific herrings.

It seemed that neither sashimi nor grilled fishes were basically eaten on this island.

Was it because of the food here being processed from dried goods? The majority of them were made through steaming.

Is it possible that the pickled fishes, made from raw Pacific herrings, were the only exception?

Nevertheless, this village's specialty wasn't just cuisine with fresh seafood.

The Senior, Edo, was a bit puffed up with pride.

- How does our olive oil taste?
- It's the best. This one is a freshly made one, isn't it? Fernando-san, how about you?
- It feels like drinkable oil.
- Your expression would be a perfect match for inflammatory words.
- The timing of your arrival was perfect. The olives were just harvested after they became mature.

The salad, which was dressed using pickles made from olives, olive

oil, salt, a citrus fruit similar to a lemon, and raisins, had a simplistic flavor. Nonetheless, quite delicious food was lined up on the table.

What Eiji knew was that a truly fresh oil won't cause a sour stomach even if it's consumed in large quantities.

Because there had been many unusual dishes, Eiji considered this trip as quite attractive.

Somehow, Both Eiji and Fernando had become a bit plump as a result.

– Is olive oil also this village's specialty?

– That's right. Our village uses salt, olive oil, and dried fishes for trading purposes.

– Despite not having cultivated lands, your business somehow managed thanks to that, right?

– Yes. A person won't survive without food. However, it's bad for that person to live without salt.

– Besides leather, we shall bring foodstuff next time as well. Broad beans, Kale, carrots, and onions, each of them are best.

– All of them will go well with olive oil.

Olive oil and wine are the leading products of all trades.

A long time ago, Greeks would use these two items for their trades, which resulted in them settling great number of cities in Mediterranean Sea.

Because there were other items which they couldn't produce, it was possible for them to acquire lots of food products, more than any other place.

As a result, artisans and bureaucrats would flourish in number even more than farmers.

Still, Eiji's eyes were not just focused on those leading products, but also on the gruel, which was placed near the edge of the table.

The white gruel was different in color than the usually eaten barley-made one.

As soon as Eiji tried to savor it, he couldn't tell its basic components due to the interfering taste mixed with the smell of milk.

Nonetheless, it was certainly not wheat.

What is this?

Could this be...? – Is what he thought.

—Rice

- Speaking of which, I'm extremely curious, but... what is this gruel?
- Is this the first time for you to see it?
- No, I've got lots of memories regarding gruel, but I was wondering whether or not I was mistaken.
- It's type of vegetable which can only be obtained at the southern part of this island. You eat the vegetable by soaking and slightly cooking it inside the milk. Well, it may not be that tasty, still...
- Can I have you show me the ingredients before cooking?
- I don't mind that, but... you're saying some strange things.

What Edo brought was certainly rice.

Unfortunately, it wasn't the Japanese-type rice but an Indica one. Still, Eiji couldn't care less about that.

That's because the rice, which he desired, despite not being able to obtain it, was now in front of his eyes.

- Can you get ahold of this rice? And no, I don't want for trading purpose but for personal use.
- Personal use? You're more and more strange. How much do you need?
- About, that's right..... about 100 kilos.
- 100 kilos?! I don't care anymore; I can't even tell what you're thinking.
- Now, now. I just want it for personal use.
- Just what lies inside this kind of food?
- A tasty method of food preparation.
- Don't be stupid. There's no way for such a thing to be delicious.

Edo probably couldn't fully understand the true feeling behind Eiji's words.

Rice was definitely not a popular food among people here. Rather than that, it was disliked to the extent of being made into gruel or treated like salad.

Despite that, it was at least different for Eiji.

Even Indica rice may be good for preparing a delicious Chinese-styled rice or a Pilaf.

I wonder, how about a risotto? As expected, it probably? won't

match with a onigiri.

With rice-related dishes popping up inside his head one after another, Eiji looked forward to his return home.

This must be the best result I've obtained during this trip. – He thought deep within heart.

Chapter 72 – The Night and the Return

It was night.

Well then, shall I go to sleep? – Eiji and the rest were able to borrow rooms, however, as he was, about to go sleep, the creaking sound of a door opening was heard.

The sound was small, and it wasn't coming from this room.

I wonder who's sleeping next to me? – At the time he thought so, there was only a single person.

That was Fran.

Rising up from his bed, he followed after her.

Gigii – The sound of creaking, heard directly, was noisy.

Perhaps it was due to Eiji's eyes being accustomed to the dark, but the outside looked unexpectedly bright for him.

Since he first arrived on this island, he would be astonished every single night at how many stars there are.

The sounds of waves reverberated in the distance.

Za za – In addition to that, sounds of quickly walking footsteps were heard.

And then, the sound of a horse breathing and trembling from the cold followed.

Eiji directed his sight toward the sounds from inside of the darkness.

Fran was riding on Yan under the starlight.

Hugging Yan's neck, she looked very relaxed.

Her eyes were closed, and her gentle expression was spellbound.

Fran's appearance was unlike her naive one, and yet again, different from her usually energetic figure.

It was another side of her, which Eiji hadn't known.

To think that she was able to make such a face.

– Fran?

– What's up, Eiji?

– Why are you at outside?

- I can't settle down and sleep whenever I'm inside a house.
- You can't sleep? That's why you are together with Yan and Yun?
- Gyusu and the rest are my family. What's more, I can't calm down myself when I sleep on a soft bed.
- Does it.... also happen when you're together with Dylan and Chiara?

Eiji asked timidly.

Could it be that Fran didn't consider humans as her family?

Not wanting to hear the expected answer, Eiji's throat became dry.

He gulped down his saliva frantically.

Fran nodded without hesitation.

- When I'm at home, there's Gyusu next to me.
- Is that so....? I guess, it's really alright then?
- It's fine. Good night, Eiji.
- Yeah, good night.

Usually, there tends to be a barn attached to each household.

In that case, it's certainly true that Gyusu would be next to her.

However, her reply felt a little bit sad.

Even though Fran was living together with Dylan and Chiara, where did her heart wander?

Provided, she cannot constantly maintain her relationship with humans....

Despite that, being told to stay together with humans after spending one's life with animals must feel difficult.

Dylan and Chiara, who had raised her together as their own child, as well as Fran herself, must have it tough.

It was a type of problem to which Eiji had no answer.

Fran and her parents could only search for that answer.

Eiji kept silent as he returned back to his room.

Not feeling in the best mood, for some reason, it took him more time to fall asleep.

The next morning.

Eiji and the rest arrived near the boat which was already loaded with

cargo

The direction of the bow was switched and ready to embark on.

– Hey, Eiji-kun.

– What?

– No, it's not like I don't believe you, but, is it really possible for us to go upstream?

– Fernando-san, have you ever swam in a river?

– I guess there were times like that.

– Then, were you able to advance when swimming against the river?

– Yeah, I was.

– In that case, it's simple to understand it's possible for us to go upstream, you see. If you can swim against the river, then it's the same for the boat.

Fernando seemed to be anxious.

Even if he understood what Eiji said, going upstream with a boat was hard for him to imagine no matter what.

Fernando would take control of the rudder and Fran would raise up the anchors.

Eiji quickly spread the sail and operated the oar.

– Well then, we are moving. The wind is okay!

– The rudder is okay!

– Raise up the anchors!

– We are departing!

As the anchors were raised up, the boat received some recoil from the added weight.

The boat gradually moved as it began to leave the coast.

Receiving the wind in its sail, the boat produced a dull sound.

At the beginning, it was really slow.

And then, the boat advanced steadily and favorably.

The distance between Marina and Auman could be covered within a day.

Despite the terrain being the same, the outlook was quite different.

– Well, we are getting close to Auman.

– Fran, soon we will be reaching your place, so be prepared.

Sigh..... even though we hurried ourselves, it will still become a problem, won't it?

- We don't know. The only thing we can do at that time will be to apologize in all sincerity.
- Don't worry! Fran did it because she wanted to.
- Hey hey, there are some people waiting there again.
- They're Dylan-san and Chiara-san.....

As soon as Eiji and the rest came alongside the riverbank, they dropped the anchors.

This time again, Dylan and Chiara arrived to welcome them under strange circumstances.

There was a considerable distance from the river to the village.

If it was not for them waiting here everyday, it would be, by no means, a coincidental meeting.

Eiji looked at Fran's face. On which, there was no sign of surprise visible.

- Fran, can Dylan-san and Chiara-san communicate with horses as well?
- Not to Fran's knowledge?.
- Then, how did they know despite Fran not being here?
- Perhaps Gyusu called them.
- Is it possible to treat a horse's call as an information about our arrival?

Fernando-san, can you believe it?

- I do.
- Still, I can't place my trust on that....

As one would expect, was such a thing possible?

It isn't something doable unless you completely have your faith in the senses of a horse.

Could it be that a family living together with horses had this much trust placed in their horses?

As soon as Eiji and the rest disembarked, Dylan and Chiara dashed toward them.

- Dylan-san, we are here to return your daughter.
- Fran! Just when we were worried about your whereabouts, you went out with them!?
- Thank god..... I'm glad you were safe.
- Since we knew about your personality, we usually wouldn't be that

worried, but, because Gyusu was left at home this time... you had us scared. You should've told us before departing.

– I'm sorry.

Dylan and Chiara embraced Fran.

Chiara was trembling, so she was most likely pretty much worried.

Eiji felt like he truly did something inexcusable. Perhaps, he should've returned Fran that time.

– I'm truly sorry. I thought about hurrying up with her return after we had finished lodging.

– No, it seems that my daughter has caused you trouble on your boat.

– Once we noticed, she was already with us. We were debating on whether or not we should return her immediately, but, we also had our next destination ahead of us, so.....

– I can imagine that, since she disappeared right after Yun and Yan had left the village. A long time ago, Fran would wander off many times.

– I told Eiji that I wanted him to let me sail together.

Once Eiji bowed down, Fran began with her explanation.

Dylan shot a fish eye glare in her direction.

It was as though Fran's body turned stiff within a moment.

– Fran, inform me before you intend to go out.

– Sorry.

– Good grief, don't make us worry.

– Sorry, Mama.

– After that, you need a good lecturing.

– Auu.....

Chiara showered Fran with her kisses,

Eiji didn't know how far she reflected on her actions; nevertheless, the problem seemed to be no longer relevant to him.

However, if possible, he wanted it to happen only this time.

Though Fran caused few problems during this trip, the most important thing would still be sincerity.

Eiji felt relieved.

As soon as their water supply was restored, they prepared to resume their sailing.

With just food and water supplies for their return trip, Eiji and Fernando had no intention of making any long stays.

– See you, Eiji! Fer!

– Yeah. Treat your parents well, got it? Dylan-san, how was the saw?

– I tried it out right away, and the work became truly convenient. I've already managed to make shelves and a desk.

– Is that so? I'm glad.

Gently waving back toward Fran, who was waving broadly with a smile on her face, Eiji asked for Dylan's impression about the saw.

If feasible, Eiji wanted to ask for an impression from every single village; nonetheless, it was probably better to leave it for the next time.

Was Fernando thinking about arranging a carpenter for Auman? A hard expression surfaced on his face.

– Regarding a carpenter, I'll figure out something later.

– Before, I tried to invite Eiji enthusiastically, but what about you, Fernando? Won't you come to Auman and join us?

– No, thank you for your consideration, even so, I've got lots of things to do. Maybe I should forward you somebody from our village..... perhaps, my subordinate, Thomas?Still, I am unable to make a prompt decision.

– Yes, I don't mind. I'm greatly looking forward to that. Hopefully, I can count on you before my house falls down.

At Dylan, who was smirking, Fernando replied with a smile.

The boat has been progressing for 2 days.

Eiji and Fernando wanted to advance while depending on the moonlight during night as well, however, they gave up as there was the fear of running aground.

As they continued their sailing from the early morning, they finally reached the halfway point.

– Looks like the wind is gone, isn't it?

- Shall we disembark the horses and prepare for pulling?
- Who's going to come down?
- I'll keep my eye of the rudder. Eiji-kun, take care of the horses.
- Got it. Stop the boat for a moment.

Eiji landed Yan and Yun from the boat.

It seemed that the top of the ground, which gave a sense of stability, was more reassuring than the top of a shaking boat. For that reason, the horses trembled repeatedly and moved their legs back and forth while making sure of the surface below them.

He put belts on the horses and tied them with a rope in front. The belts were chest-type ones, called harnesses, used to attach plows and harrows.

The boat and the horses were connected.

- Excellent, let's move forward. Fernando-san, raise the anchors! It's fine not to spread the sail. If we don't pay attention to small adjustments, it will be dangerous.
- Understood!
- Yan, Yun. I'm relying on you. If you are troubled, don't hesitate in telling me.

Eiji spoke while looking in their eyes.

Yun and Yan's big pupils were glittering and shining as they gazed at Eiji.

Perhaps, they can understand one's emotions when staring fixedly at that person's eyes....

Was that really so?

Nevertheless, Eiji didn't plan to be forcible.

Were he to exhaust these horses with hard labor, he would probably feel very sorry for them.

The boat once again started to progress

They would take a considerable break every hour.

When the horses became tired, they would even rest for 30 minutes. Anyway, it was essential to return back steadily without wearing them out.

However, this speed was clearly dull.

At this rate, their journey would take them 120% longer.

Were Yun and Yan exhausted from their daily pulling job? – Eiji thought.

However, he soon noticed it wasn't true.

As they continued to approach the highlands, the river stream became clearly fast.

The water wheel in Siena would move with an unusual power.

Even the river's flow toward Tal was remarkably quick.

Eiji forgot that the upper river was quite strong.

– Fernando-san, once you can leave the rudder still, please come down and help me.

– Understood. I'll be there immediately.

– Yan, Yun, are you okay?

Wearing leather gloves, Eiji pulled the rope next to him the gloves were obtained through a trade. Even if Eiji was to make a mistake, he wouldn't get injured.

Holding the rope, he could feel the resistance passing through his hands.

Incredible, so they were pulling a heavy thing like this.

Carrying the rope on his shoulder, Eiji walked forward.

Placing it from his hands to his back, Eiji could feel the profound weight of the boat.

Each time he stepped on the pebbles, his steps would produce a sound.

Following that, Fernando dashed over to support Eiji.

– Let's go, Fernando-san. Fight!

– Hm?

– That was the signal to start!

– I don't get what you're saying!

– Damn, this is indeed heavy.

Could it be that commercial slangs don't work?

Making a wry smile, he continued to diligently pull the rope.

– We have arrived

- Really?
- You'll probably remember once you see it, it's the watermill.
- Ah, I'm glad..... Both my shoulders and lower back are already at their limit.

It was a long trip.

Both the horses and the people were exhausted.

Eiji thought that the first part of their trip went a little bit too smooth; nevertheless, it seemed to be canceled out by this.

As much as he would look, Fernando's face returned to its original shape as well.

They both gave up on approaching near the coast from which they first departed.

If it's near Eiji's workshop, the boat shouldn't cause a big problem.

I'll recover it another day. – He thought.

Having the familiar scenery in front of them, they lost strength.

It didn't look like they would move a step more.

– Finally, we have arrived, haven't we?

– Yeah. Guess I'll have to figure out how to return for the next time.

– Good grief.

Eiji felt like agreeing with Fernando.

I wonder if, starting next time, we should cease going together on the trade expeditions. – He thought.

Chapter 73 – After the Return

(First part)

Once the cargo was disembarked from the boat, Eiji fully loaded the wheelbarrow with rice bags and advanced his way back to home. With this, we will be able to savor rice each day from now on. While thinking so, a smile formed naturally on his expression. In order not to be considered a weirdo, Eiji needed an immense amount of effort so as to control his emotion. Despite saying so, everyone seemed to be busy as he didn't meet anyone along the way.

Everything remained the same since his departure from the village. Has it been just a little over a month? Eiji felt nostalgia welling up inside him.

The door of his house was opened wide.

In this neighborhood, people had no sense of crime prevention. As such, his door being opened was not out of place.

Even though houses were distributed between each household, most of these families were like branches of a larger one.

I wonder if Tanya-san has been doing fine?

Hiding his footsteps, Eiji entered inside the house so as to surprise Tanya a little bit.

Because the door and the louver windows were opened, the interior was bright thanks to the sunlight flowing in.

He quickly discovered Tanya's appearance in the right side of their home, near the part with the barn.

Compared to one month earlier, her tummy had grown bigger.

It was already the seventh month for her.

Eiji wanted Tanya to start resting soon; nevertheless, despite thinking so, he was the one who had put her in charge of house-sitting, so he couldn't firmly express what he thinks.

Despite her receiving aid from the neighbors, there were lots of tasks she had to do, such as cooking and washing.

Using her slow movements, Tanya was also taking care of their

livestock.

There were many things, like collecting animals feces in order to maintain hygiene, supplying livestock with water and fodder, and simple grooming of animals.

Right now, she was giving food to Button.

While moving her hands, Tanya spoke toward Button.

– Button, Eiji-san is surely late, isn't he?

– Puhi!

– It's lonesome to sleep alone during night.

– Puhi Puhi!

– You're saying that you're with me? Thank you, but I guess Button won't become a replacement.

– Puhi.....

– Did I make you feel down? Sorry for that. I'm glad that Eiji-san strives as a worker, but, feeling lonely just because he can't be next to me due to his job feels complicated.

Seeing Tanya, who was speaking to Button with a gloomy face, Eiji couldn't bring himself to call out to her.

He knew that he would make her feel lonely, but not to this extent.

Eiji felt he wasn't considerate enough.

To think that Eiji would make her like this while he was simply enjoying doing trade with new villages and making discoveries.

Keeping silent, Eiji waited for Tanya's next words.

– This won't do. If Eiji-san finds out that I'm sad like this, he will start paying more attention. I've got to make sure that he can leave home in a positive and relieved mood. After all, protecting one's home is a woman's job.

Fine, let's become lively!

Seeing the appearance of Tanya becoming aware and turning energetic, Eiji couldn't bring himself to play a prank on her now.

Not being aware of Eiji's presence, Tanya's words were most likely genuine.

Were he to pay attention and decide to return back tomorrow, Tanya would probably notice his true motif sooner or later even if she was to be happy at first.

He himself wasn't the type of person that would be glad from becoming someone else's hindrance.

Reflecting a bit more on what a family is, Eiji felt he had to strive to do better in his work, far more than ever before.

That, should be possibly the best return gift from him towards Tanya's expectation.

Not feeling like he can leave, Eiji went back to the entryway while hiding the sound of his footsteps.

He took a deep breath and calmed himself down.

I'll pretend that I didn't see and make it looks like I've just returned.

– I'm back!

– Eiji-san?! Welcome back.

Tanya, who was pregnant, rushed over to the entrance with a quick pace.

And then, lightly hugged Eiji immediately after approaching him.

– Welcome back. Thank you for your trouble during this long trip.

– I'm home. Weren't you lonely while I was away for a long time?

– I've been doing fine thanks to everyone treating me well.

Hearing the words from Tanya who was acting firm, Eiji felt an unmanageable sensation gushing inside his chest,

He thought he was already loving this person plenty enough.

Despite that, Eiji felt more and more affectionate toward her.

I'll make her happy. – he thought.

– Is that so? I was feeling lonely, but...

– Eh? really? So Eiji-san is a person that becomes easily isolated. Still, I really wanted to meet you. Being able to see Eiji-san's face makes me glad.

Tanya and Eiji embraced each other for a while.

After the two of them gently put their lips together and made sure of each other's warmth, they slowly separated.

Tanya suddenly noticed the rice bags.

– What is this big luggage?

– These are the best result of this time's trip.

- Oh my, what's inside of them?
- It's rice. It's considered the main diet in my country. Even if it's just partially, it seems that I can have Tanya-san. as well, savor the previously mentioned dishes from my hometown.
- I'm looking forward to that. But, is it possible to eat all of these?

Tanya's concern was understandable.

Despite saying that they were trade products for personal use, all of the rice, which he exchanged for, were his.

An amount of rice which consists of 100 kilos is probably not something that can be easily finished.

Providing that they both consume it together, it will be 50 kilos for each of them.

This much would be roughly equivalent to 80% of a yearly amount for an average person in modern Japan.

In other words, assuming that wheat remains their main diet, they won't finish off the rice even within a single year.

- Once we know of any delicious food preparation using this rice, shall we share with the people from our neighborhood?
- You don't know of any food preparation?
- I wonder about that...

He felt hesitant in his reply.

Eiji used to have everything prepared automatically by his rice cooker, therefore, he didn't know of any cooking method concerning rice.

His only experience of cooking rice with a fire with cooking utensils was his memory of the distant past when he attended his outdoor school.

What's more, if possible, Eiji wanted to eat rice after he crafts an iron pot instead of using cooking utensils.

Even though the rice variety was different, there was probably no food that couldn't be eaten after cooking.

Being able to make things comfortably at any time might just be the biggest side benefit of being a blacksmith.

It's a job that allows one to move from one place to another, and make things whenever they're needed.

- As soon as you learn any method of rice cooking, please teach

me. I too, will do my best to come up with something and make a tasty food.

– I'm looking forward to that.

Eiji decided to depend on Tanya's kind proposal.

Later, while having a meal, Eiji talked with Tanya about interesting events that took place during his trip.

Tanya's homemade cooking fell behind in comparison with what he had on his trip due to raw materials; nevertheless, the taste, which he was used to, and the calm atmosphere gave him the feeling that the food was more delicious than anything else.

I guess, taste isn't something that can be sensed with just the tongue – Eiji thought.

After finishing their dinner and presenting Tanya with some souvenirs, Eiji went to sleep immediately.

He lost a lot of stamina from his return by upstream.

If he was to have a slow discussion, then perhaps it would be after he recovers his energy the following day.

Starting from the next time, it will probably be more efficient to set up a stop in their middle way and carry in luggage using land routes.

Or rather, I certainly want to do it. – He thought.

Again it will require efforts from the villagers, however, for the sake of performing regular trades, it should be incorporated as the next idea for improvement.

Once Eiji slept overnight and recovered his stamina, he moved toward tribal chief's house.

There were lots of things he had to talk about, such as giving a report of this time's trade, discussing present countermeasures, and suggesting points that need to be improved from now on.

As soon as this is over, Eiji will finally be able to head toward his workshop and ask for the details from his disciples.

He looked forward to how much Pietro, Dante, and the others had grown over the past month.

Eiji wanted to finish this bothersome report as fast as possible.

Inside the house of the tribal chief, all the village executives lined up.

Besides the tribal chief, Bona, there were Mike, Jane, Philip, Giorgio, and Bernardo.

And then, this time, Tanya too was participating as a listener.

Eiji had heard before that Tanya had received lessons as the tribal chief's granddaughter, so it wouldn't be that strange; nevertheless, it was perhaps the proof that this time's negotiation was of importance.

Indeed, it's troublesome – Eiji changed his way of looking at things.

– Well then, has everyone gathered?

– Fernando-san hasn't arrived yet?

– Sorry for making you wait.

– You just came at just the right moment. Then, let's begin the meeting without delay. What you exported for the trade were furs; textiles; leather products, such as leather belts and leather boots; iron-made tools; blankets; and woolen goods. Was there anything else besides these?

– We also brought alcohol and soap.

– I guess it was so. And then, what you obtained were all high grade products, like olive oil, salt, spices, horses, gold and silver tableware, correct? To think that, in this one trip, you would yield the equivalent of this village's annual revenue in foodstuff alone.....

Having a dumbfounded expression, yet being unable to suppress her joy, a smile appeared near her mouth as she uttered.

The other members have probably not yet realized what Eiji and Fernando acquired.

Putting a similarly shocked expression, they began to talk with the people next to them.

The only ones who were calmly grasping the situation were Bona and Tanya.

– They're Horses. Wifey, I wonder which ones are more handsome between ours and Jean's.

– Who knows. I could care little as long they will help with our labor. With this, the land reclamation will progress, won't it?

– Right right. If we don't treasure them, it won't do. Don't you think so, Ber?

– Giorgio, you can take care of them, right-be?

– Obviously, I can.

The horses were the center of attention.

Since horses were unusually expensive, they were probably objects of adoration.

It was decided that once a stable is quickly erected, Bernardo and Giorgio will be looking after the horses.

Bona, who kept a short distance from the hustle and bustle, seemed to prefer observing this village's affairs with a calm attitude til the end.

– Well then, can I have you tell me about what we need to improve from now on, and what you have noticed? Also, if there are any agreement you have made during your trip, can you report it to me?

– Fernando-san?

– I'll explain regarding the carpenter's stuff. About the promises you made, it should be fine for you to report.

– Understood.

Then, what kind of promises did I make?

To begin with, Eiji recalled villages which he visited.

First, they went to Tal.

Then, they sailed to Mostori where they met with Pierro.

After that, they were welcomed at the river by a party of people, and lastly, received a warm reception from the village of Marina.

....Til here, there should be no mistake about the journey.

I guess a piece of paper would be desirable at times like this. – he thought.

Was a parchment supposed to be made from a goat's skin just like its name suggests?

Next time, I'll try asking if there is any ink or parchment.

– The first problem will be whether or not we should tell Tal about the manufacturing method of the distilled alcohol. Provided we do, what will be the equivalent value for that?

– Eiji, what's your opinion?

– In this village, there are no redundant people. I think I wouldn't mind telling them on some conditions.

– Fumu.....if possible, we would rather monopolize the alcohol, but... So what are the conditions?

– We could request them to send us a regular amount of foodstuff,

like wheat, each year. Or perhaps, we can possibly have them make drugs from the distilled alcohol at the same time and determine Siena as their first trading partner?

– What's your motif behind that?

– It will increase the population of people in the villages. What's more, improving living conditions, as well as decreasing famine and illnesses will be the first step toward strengthening the capacity of the villages.

– Fumu, furthermore, if we alone get our hands on lots of foodstuff, we won't starve. As for me, I've no objections. How about the rest?

Bona looked around to the surrounding people.

Philip, Tanya, Bernardo, and Giorgio nodded without showing any protest.

On the other hand, Jane was pondering about something, and Mike suddenly raised his hand.

– Yes, yes. I do.

– What?

– There's no problem in us making our own alcohol after telling them the method, right?

– In the end, it's just the method that we will pass.

– Then, I've no complaint.

– Tribal chief, may I?

– It's fine, Jane, you may talk.

– I don't particularly mind about telling them the method, but it won't be funny if the alcohol is recklessly mass produced. Is there any equipment required for making it?

– There is.

– Then, how about we sell them the equipment without telling them how to make it?

– That's a good idea.

I see – Eiji thought.

With this it's possible to control the amount of production, and therefore, continue their business management.

It will be as also easier and more natural to impose conditions, so there doesn't seem to be any problem.

– Eiji, what do you think?

- Understood. Just like Jane-san said, it's probably better to sell them the still each time.
- I guess this matter has been settled. How about your business outside Tal?
- No, there wasn't particularly....ah, there was.
- What?
- It's a talk which puts Nazioni in the center, about the ruler. Because it's also related to Mostori, I'd like to bring up this whole topic for discussion later.
- Is that so? Excellent, then please continue.
- Yes

There were lots of issues they had to decide on.
It looks like the meeting will take a while.

Chapter 74 – After the Return (last part)

Once the report about each village had concluded, it was now time for the discussion about the countermeasures to be taken from now on.

– Well then, we too, should consider a mutiny soon.

With Bona's hoarse voice, the atmosphere of the meeting changed, Even though they had been buoyantly thinking about the next development for the village, the mood was now filled with a tension that made one's skin tingle.

After a short commotion, the mood immediately turned silent.

Without anyone uttering a single word, sounds of people gulping down their saliva reverberated noisily in a strange way.

As soon as Philip raised his hand, Bona urged him to speak with her eyes.

– T-That's....You mean like becoming independent?

– We shall decide on that too. Cooperating with others and establishing a new representative is a possible option. It's also fine for us to become a representative as well. Whichever it is, just separating from Nazioni will be, alone, good enough.

– If we do so, won't they send their troops against us?

That's the natural course of action – Bona nodded while saying this to Eiji. (?)

Eiji looked around him.

At least, nobody seemed to show a strong disagreement.

Ah, so everyone has reached the limit of their patience? – He thought.

The talk started with Eiji reporting about the growing dissatisfaction among several villages, such as Tal and Auman, against Nazioni's rule.

With mostly no political measures, perhaps it couldn't be helped that the people had grown dissatisfied from being exploited in the form of

compulsory labor and taxes.

As for Eiji, he thought that it would probably be better to follow others in case a war occurs; nevertheless, it seemed that not everyone shared the same viewpoint.

– I agree with the tribal chief. I'm thankful to Nazioni for uniting the east and west side of the island, however, if they intend to misuse and brag about that forever, I too can't remain silent.

– Me too, I'm of the same mind as wifey.

At Jane and Mike's declaration, the other executives nodded as well. Eiji observed Tanya's face.

I wonder, what's Tanya-san's view on this?

After she looked at him worrisomely, she clinched her fist firmly.

Is that so? So even Tanya-san had the same thoughts?

That alone was probably the proof of people feeling strong injustice toward Nazioni's policies.

Eiji too, thought that it's better to avoid expressing any strong opposition from himself.

However, while it may be true, there was no way for them to cause any thoughtless uprising.

Provided that Nazioni dispatched their troops right now, they will be suppressed within a single moment.

They have to advance with their preparations meticulously.

If possible, Eiji wanted Nazioni to give up on sending their soldiers once they hear about the mutiny.

– Now, there don't seem to be any opposing viewpoints, right? Then, any ideas regarding how we should move with the preparations in practice?

– Shouldn't we make emergency stores for foodstuff and strengthen our defense-be?

– W-we also need weapons.

– For me, who has actually gathered the experience through trades, I think that, first. we need to reach an agreement with the surrounding villages. Even if we were to cause an uprising alone, Nazioni would probably gather up people from other villages in order to attack us. Since we are outnumbered, we have to consider

cooperation first before making a move.

– Most of all, shouldn't we keep the preparations a secret from Nazioni?

Opinions continued to appear one after another.

Even without Eiji butting in, they would probably realize what's necessary.

It didn't take much time for the talk to switch over to a detailed plan.

When one problem with the plan was settled, another one would arise.

First, the most crucial thing to do was not to let Nazioni learn of their plan.

In addition, they had to build fences for defense purpose in every house under the pretext of protecting them from beasts.

Next, it would be creating a bank at the river for flood prevention and restricting approach from the outside.

Then, making food reserves using trade and reaching an agreement with other villages.

It was decided that the deserted houses, which were previously intended for sick people, would be refurbished and used to store emergency food.

Not to mention, Franko won't be observing them since there won't be anyone living inside.

The plan wasn't something to be carried out within a half or a single year.

Perhaps, it was necessary to consider it in a span of 5 to 10 years.

And then, it was also essential for them to continue the development of the village in the meantime.

Luckily, the problem of food shortage has been gradually improving thanks to the introduction of the four-field crop rotation and the erection of the barn.

It may be possible to put an end to deaths caused by malnutrition as well.

Once the plan had been decided, the discussion moved toward the final topic.

– Eiji, it's not like I don't appreciate your way of thinking, but, since various things have turned out like this, can I have you be more

understanding of the situation?

It was the problem regarding Eiji not making weapons.

Til now, he would normally refuse to make any.

However, this time, the lives of people he knew were at stake.

Depending on his decision, someone may lose their life.

It could be Mike, Bona, or even Tanya sitting next to him.

Eiji moved his eyes from side to side/around the room.

Every executive member, who was present, looked into his eyes.

Am I really forced to do so?

Eiji's eyes were casted down toward his lap.

What's more, he could feel Tanya's hand now.

He once more asked himself.

Given that I refuse, won't I have regret at the time someone dies?

I'll do it. I've decided to do it. – He thought.

Were he to lose Tanya due to that, Eiji would probably resent himself and his decision for the rest of his life.

For a moment, Eiji kept silent; nevertheless, his power left his body at once.

When it comes to this, it can't be helped.

It's for the sake of protecting himself and his family.

– Understood. I shall make weapons.

– Fumu, so you've realized?

Together with Bona's words, Eiji could feel a stream of relief flowing from somewhere inside the place.

Was everyone, this worried?

Eiji had already refused to make weapons once, back when they were exterminating the wolves.

Even those spears had now been remodeled into hoes.

Certainly, he was considering not acknowledge Bona's words.

Nevertheless, there's a difference between his surrounding from the time he first arrived here and the one from now in which his baby is about to be born.

– Despite saying so, Nazioni can, by no means, learn about you making weapons. About that, we shall discuss how to manage it

successfully.
– Understood.

After this meeting, Eiji planned to make an appearance in his workshop.

In addition to Pietro being an inhabitant of Siena, his honesty during the infidelity riot was the actual proof that Eiji could place his faith in Pietro.

However, the remaining 5 were Nazioni's people.

There is no doubt to consider, that they would relay the information once they learn of this village's motif.

And when I thought the meeting was over, there was still one more thing to do?

Exhale – Eiji sighed.

As soon as Eiji arrived at the workplace, he noticed the usual sound coming from it.

He hasn't experienced the sound of the working watermill for a while. Once he passed through the door, he was greeted with energetic voices.

– I'm back, everyone. Have you been doing fine?

– Welcome back, Master.

– Howdy. Thanks for your hard work.

– A-h, it's Eiji-saaan. Long time no see. Seems like you gained somewhat of a tan.

Oh, looks like Dante have become a bit more honest.

And Katharina is the same as usual?

On the other hand, Pietro seemed to have become more serious.

While watching the figures of his greeting disciples, Eiji urged them with his hand in order to resume the works.

There were a limited number of labors, which Eiji entrusted to them before his one-month absence.

Even Pietro was allowed to make only extraordinarily small things, such as arrowheads and fasteners.

The rest of the students were assigned to: cutting firewood, making

charcoal, and mining iron ore. Therefore, they hadn't had any opportunity to polish their smithing skills directly.

For that reason, it seemed that the sharpening job, which allowed one to touch even a single tool, was highly popular among them.

Everyone was desperate to polish their own skills.

They tried to respond to the given circumstances with all their power.

– Excellent, then today, shall we proceed with the hammering at once? Let's decide on the turn of assistants. First will be Pietro.

– Yes! Please!

Kin kon – Pietro struck the blade.

As one would expect, when did he become this frank?

Eiji became anxious for a while.

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